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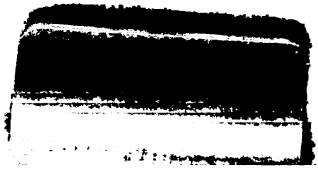

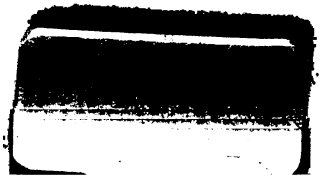

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The train pushed forward swiftly

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"AMONG THE SIOUX" SERIES

WITH CARRINGTON ON THE BOZEMAN ROAD

BY

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON
AUTHOR OF "WITH SULLY INTO THE SIOUX LAND,"
"THE CONQUEST OF THE MISSOURI," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN W. NORTON

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED YOUNG WIFE

FRANCES LEE HANSON

A LOYAL DAUGHTER OF PIONEER SOLDIERS AND SETTLERS OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

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WITH CARRINGTON ON THE BOZEMAN ROAD

CHAPTER I

UP STAKES FOR BOZEMAN!

"WALLACE, I have decided in favor of Montana. For people with limited capital but plenty of energy, it is a land of promise. You and I can make a success out there if we go at it with determination and do it soon, before the country fills up. And that is what we must do."

Mr. Smith laid back in its place the bolt of muslin from which he had just cut an order for a departing customer, and, folding his arms, leaned against the counter, regarding, with a glance which seemed to invite objection, the slender youth who stood in the middle of the store, dressed in the worn blue uniform of a Union soldier.

But if he expected objection, he was disappointed.

On the contrary, the young soldier squared his already square shoulders a trifle more and returned the glance with one of lively interest and approval.

"I 'm glad of it, father," he said, heartily. "I think, too, we can do better in Montana than we can by staying here, in Minnesota. It is a long way off; we don't know much about it, and it will doubtless take lots of time and effort to get there and establish a business. But others have done it, and so can we."

Mr. Smith looked out of the front windows, and, seeing no one on the straggling village street who seemed likely to come in soon and disturb them, he walked around the counter and seated himself beside his son.

"I really know more about Montana than you think, Wallace," said he. "I 've done a good deal of investigating and had some letters from an old friend out there recently. There was no chance to tell you about these things last evening, when you first reached home from the front. Mother and I and the children kept you too busy telling about your army experiences."

"Yes, sir, that 's a fact," rejoined Wallace, laughing. "It seemed as if we 'd never get through talking, I 've been away so long. Even at that, though, I hated to leave the regiment down there in Carolina before the rest of the boys were mustered out, but the surgeon would n't let me stay when he found I was threatened with typhoid fever. But now when Lee and Johnston have surrendered, I am sure the war is practically over, and the Eighth Minnesota won't see any more fighting; so I 'm satisfied. We shall have plenty of chance for reminiscences later on. The main thing now is to get settled down to business. What have you heard about Montana, father, since I was home on sick furlough, the end of last October?"

"Well, in the first place," Mr. Smith answered, "I 've read in all the different Minnesota papers I get hold of from time to time, the letters and descriptive articles sent back by men who are out in that country. Then I 've talked with several who have come back; all of them, to be sure, men who went there solely for the purpose of mining. Some of them have been lucky, and some not. Of course,

though, I have n't heard much about opportunities for legitimate business out there from any of these. Gold seekers crazy on that one subject are not apt to pay much attention to whether a country is likely to develop commercially in the future. Here and there, however, I 've picked up valuable facts. But my best information—and it 's this that has decided me—came in two long letters from Doctor Tom Mahan. You remember hearing me speak of him, Wallace?"

"Oh, yes, sir; often. In fact, I dimly remember seeing him, when he visited us, years ago, in Wisconsin."

"Is that so? I did n't realize you were old enough to remember that. But you know Tom and I were boyhood chums at the old home in Ohio, and we 've always kept in touch with each other even though our letters have been written at pretty long intervals, sometimes. Tom 's always been a good deal of a rolling stone, though he 's a fine physician, and has made more money than most rolling stones do. Both of us have always cherished a hope that sometime we might settle down near each other. Now

he 's located in a little village out there in Montana called Bozeman City. Sounds pretty big, but it is n't. However, Tom 's convinced the place has a bright future before it, much brighter than Bannack or Virginia City, and last fall he wrote and urged me to come out and go into mercantile business there. Tom painted his picture in such glowing colors that I was interested even if I was n't convinced. When I answered his letter I asked him a good many questions of a practical kind. Last week I received his reply to that letter, and I must say it satisfies me on every point. Bozeman City is only a hamlet now, but it lies on the Gallatin River, in a fine fertile valley that is filling up with farmers. There are a great many placer mines being worked in the vicinity, and prospecting has proved the existence of vast permanent deposits which won't be exhausted for many years to come. The demand for groceries and dry goods—staple merchandise—is keen and increasing. Prices are high, because there are very few stores at present to supply the demand. Altogether it looks most promising to me."

But, father, if we 're going out there this year we 'll have to get about it quickly. Here it is nearly the middle of May. Any wagon-train expedition starting from the Niobrara, with a road to build as it goes along, will surely be starting soon, if it is not started already. How do you know you can sell your business here in a few days?"

"I already have a very satisfactory offer, Wallace," Mr. Smith answered. "Nothing remains to be done but accept it, and I can get my money, and we may start at once."

"What does mother think about it?"

"I talked it all over with her before you came home, and she is perfectly satisfied; she is as much of a pioneer woman, you know, as I am a pioneer man. It was her suggestion, however, that she and the children stay in St. Paul for a year; not on her own account at all, but for the sake of keeping the children at school. Your mother and I have simply been waiting to find out whether the plan would suit you, before carrying it out."

"That was very kind of you, father, to make my wishes of such importance," Wallace said, grate-

fully. "Certainly I want to do what you think best."

"I know, Wallace; but you will be a man in two years more, and it is a matter of as much importance to you where we locate as it is to me, for you want to be satisfied when you start out on your life's career, and I mean that you shall be if I can manage it."

"Nothing could satisfy me better than this plan, father."

"Very well, then, my boy, we 'll consider it settled," said Mr. Smith, rising. "I 'll close up the deal today for this store and stock, and then we 'll start out as soon as possible on our new venture."

He went to his desk in the back of the store to balance his books and make everything ready for the transfer of the business to its new owner, while his son walked upstairs to the simple apartments of the family on the second floor, to discuss with his mother the momentous step which they were about to take.

Wallace Smith, though only nineteen years of age, had passed during the four years just preceding the

opening of our narrative, through a boyhood so filled with adventure and warlike experience that it had virtually made him a man in judgment and self-reliance long before his time. But in that respect he differed little from the hundreds of thousands of other boys of about his own age who, in the generation of the great American Civil War, had been called upon to do the largest share in saving the Nation from destruction. His experiences, however, had been a little more varied, and his wanderings more extensive, than those of most of the young soldiers, many of whom had perhaps passed several years in some hard-fighting regiment in the comparatively restricted area of Virginia, or of Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas. In 1862 Wallace and his parents had been living, as they still were, at Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, where Mr. Smith conducted a pioneer grocery and dry goods store. There they had passed through a terrible ordeal, when Fort Ridgely, defended only by a handful of soldiers and refugee settlers, was besieged by an army of Sioux Indians. This happened in August, 1862, at the beginning of the outbreak of that great

nation of savages against the authority of the United States, in the course of which more than a thousand white people were massacred along the frontiers of Minnesota.

Less than two years later, in the spring of 1864, Wallace reached the age of eighteen, when he became able to offer his services to the Union cause, as he had been eagerly longing to do. He enlisted in the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, and with that regiment took part in the campaign of General Alfred Sully against the hostile Indians in Dakota Territory, along the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Having been wounded during the campaign, he was granted sick furlough and returned to Minnesota by way of St. Louis in company with his intimate friend, Al Briscoe, a lad of about his own age. On their way down the Missouri River they encountered the army of the Confederate General Price, on its famous raid through the State of Missouri. They were captured by guerrillas, and made their escape to the Union forces at Glasgow, only to find themselves involved in more trouble when that place, after being heroically de-

fended, was captured by a part of Price's army. However, they eventually reached St. Louis, from which place Wallace returned to St. Paul and Fort Ridgely. After a bare week spent with his parents, he hurried off to rejoin his regiment, which had meantime returned overland from the upper Missouri. With it he soon went South to join General Sherman's army near Savannah, Georgia, and took part in the campaign northward through the Carolinas until late in April, 1865, just after the surrender of General Joseph E. Johnston's army, when his regimental surgeon found him threatened with typhoid fever and authorized his honorable discharge from the service. Wallace reached his home at Fort Ridgely in the middle of May; what occurred there in the eighteen hours after his arrival, we already know.

It might be supposed that a boy in Wallace's position would have longed for a little rest after the toils of active campaigning, and that he would have looked with some dismay upon the idea of immediately starting out into a wild country upon an

expedition which would be certain to call for further exertions fully as severe as those he had just passed through. But Wallace was a lad filled with an abundance of energy and enthusiasm, and the mystery of new lands beckoned him irresistibly. He had hardly boarded the transport at Wilmington, North Carolina, which bore him northward, when the weariness, loss of appetite, and headache which had been oppressing him in the low, swampy country of the Carolinas began to leave him, and by the time he had reached Fort Ridgely, breathing the pure, bracing air of the North, he felt as well as ever in his life and ready for any enterprise. The thought of being with his dear ones once more and that he was about to take an active and important part in founding a new home for them under the shadow of the far-a-way Rocky Mountains, amid new scenes and associations whose uncertain character lent to them a pleasing fascination, now contributed not a little to his high spirits, and he was prepared for whatever might come. To be sure, if he had been able to foresee even a small part of all that the suc-

ceeding months were to bring forth, even his adventurous soul might have shrunk from such a prospect; but he could not know, and therefore no shadow of misgiving oppressed him.

It took Mr. Smith but a few days to familiarize his successor, already an experienced retail merchant, with the few local details which would be helpful to him in carrying on the business successfully. Meanwhile, he and Wallace were preparing three wagons to carry the family and their few household effects to St. Paul. The end of the week found them well on their way, and by the first of June Mrs. Smith and the two young children—Bessie, aged eleven, and Harvey, eight—were comfortably settled in a rented cottage on the edge of the capital of Minnesota, still a small city, but beautiful in its surroundings and full of life and promise. Though they had acted from the beginning with energetic promptitude, Mr. Smith and Wallace realized that they had no time to waste if they were to join the Montana train before it left the mouth of the Niobrara, or if they were even to overtake it before it had gone far on its road. They knew nothing in de-

tail of its plans or time of starting, and they had still a hard journey of several hundred miles before them to Yankton, and the purchase and outfitting of their wagons to attend to after they should reach there. So, in order to make all possible speed, they determined to travel on horseback, reducing their personal baggage to a small bundle each, in addition to their rifles, revolvers, and a limited supply of ammunition. Food they did not need to carry on this stage of their journey, for they were to travel over the Floyd River Military Road from St. Paul to Sioux City, Iowa; and though the highway ran through a country which was still almost a wilderness, it was quite well traveled, and stage houses existed at intervals frequent enough to serve meals and give lodging places to travelers.

Mrs. Smith, courageous woman though she was and accustomed to the numerous changes and chances of the frontier, naturally felt downcast and lonely as, early one bright June morning, she bade good-by to her eldest son and her husband, neither of whom she could expect to see again for at least a year.

"Now you must look out for each other all the

time, you two," she said, as she clasped her arms about them in a farewell embrace, and smiled wistfully into their faces. "Remember, you are all that Bessie and Harvey and I have in this world. What should we do if anything happened to either of you?"

"Never fear, Kate, my dear," Mr. Smith replied, reassuringly. "We shall get along all right and you will hear from us often, for there 'll be plenty of chances to send letters back to you."

"Twelve months will go by quickly, mother," added Wallace, "and then we 'll come for you and these tearful youngsters." He affectionately kissed his brother and sister, both of whom were crying softly. "Then won't you be glad we 've gone out ahead of you and made a home in that fine country? Very likely we shall have a house ready for you, with real hammered gold ceilings and partitions."

"Hardly that, Wallace," said his mother. "But I do hope you will find conditions as promising as you expect. My prayers will be with you day and night."

"And they will guard and protect us, Kate, I know!" her husband said, seriously. "But now, dear ones, Wallace and I must be starting, if we are to cover forty miles to-day, which is our program. Good-by and may God keep you safe until we meet again."

A moment more, and they were astride of the two impatient horses standing before the door; and then the last flutter of waving handkerchiefs saluted them as they passed the corner of the next block and turned their faces to the front, on the first stage of their journey into the golden Northwest.

CHAPTER II

YANKTON, A PIONEER CAPITAL

YANKTON, the capital of Dakota, was, when Mr. Smith and Wallace rode into it one afternoon about a week later, a little frontier town of only a few hundred inhabitants, sprawled along a bluff overlooking the restless Missouri; yet it was the seat of government of a Territory larger than the German Empire with Greece and Belgium thrown in, for it embraced not only the country later carved into the States of North and South Dakota, but also Wyoming, and extended from the Big Sioux and the Red River on the east to the Rocky Mountains on the west. But, except for some tiny settlements on its eastern and southern borders and a few isolated military and fur-trading posts, most of them along the Missouri River, the Territory was a wilderness, inhabited only by the Indians and the abundant wild creatures of the prairie, the moun-

tains, and the forests. The capital was beautifully situated on high ground sloping gradually to the river at the southeastern edge of the town, making a convenient landing place for steamboats, while westward the bluffs mounted higher until at the western city limits a magnificent panorama lay spread at the observer's feet. The view reached for twenty miles down the broad, fertile valley of the Missouri and for about the same distance upstream; it included rich stretches of level grass-land waiting only for the plowshare to transform them into fields of grain; also dense forests of dark-green timber, which were reflected in the bosom of the river. The stream itself, ribbed with glistening sand bars and dotted here and there by the pale verdure of willow-grown islands, wound in majestic curves back and forth across the valley on its journey to the sea.

There were two steamboats lying at the levee as Mr. Smith and Wallace came into town; freight was piled on the bank and in the long warehouse fronting the landing; and a number of deck hands carrying boxes and crates from the steamer and loading them into drays which stood backed up near the landing

stages, lent an air of bustling activity to the scene not unlike that presented in the older and larger towns along the lower Missouri and the Mississippi. The newcomers, however, did not pause at the river bank but, inquiring for a lodging place, were directed to the Ash Hotel, a one-story-and-a-half frame building, unpretentious but comfortable, and very much the best hostelry in town. After taking their horses to the livery barn connected with the house, they entered the office, where the proprietor, a portly man, with eyes which smiled genially above his heavy beard, greeted them cordially and with a certain amount of curiosity.

After arranging for accommodation for a few days and answering Mr. Ash's questions in regard to the condition of the road they had traveled from St. Paul, Mr. Smith inquired, not without anxiety, as much depended on the answer, "Can you give me any news of the expedition that was to go to Virginia City from the mouth of the Niobrara?"

"Still outfitting at Niobrara City," replied the proprietor, at which the Smiths heaved sighs of relief. "It ought to have started weeks ago, and it

may get away any time now. It has been waiting for military escort and enough supplies to last the troops through to Montana. The last news I heard of it, it was still waiting—just about the way 'little Mac' did down on the Peninsula!" He laughed and so did Wallace, appreciatively, and the latter asked, "Who 's in command?"

"Sawyer; Colonel Jim Sawyer," answered Mr. Ash. "Are you gentlemen figuring on going out with him?"

"Yes," returned Wallace. He added, to his father, "We seem to be here soon enough."

"But there 'll be no time to waste, even at that," Mr. Smith rejoined. "We still have to get all our outfit and take it across the Missouri," he explained to Mr. Ash.

At this moment a pretty young girl who had been sitting near the doorway, reading a book, arose and came to the desk.

"Captain Tripp is in town, papa," she said, looking at Mr. Ash. "I saw him down the street a few minutes ago. They say some of the Company B boys are to go with the Sawyer train. Perhaps Cap-

tain Tripp could give the gentlemen more information than we can."

"Excuse me," said Wallace suddenly, addressing the girl, "but you don't mean Captain William Tripp, of the First Battalion of Dakota Cavalry?"

"Yes," she replied, smiling.

"Why, I know him," Wallace exclaimed. "I know all of the Company B boys. They were with General Sully last year on the upper Missouri. It 'll be great if some of them are going with us."

"You know them, do you?" asked Mr. Ash in pleased surprise. "Well, that 's fine. They 're a great lot of boys, those cavalry of ours. Where did you see Captain Tripp, Julia?" he asked, turning to his daughter.

"At Bramble & Miner's store," the girl replied. "He was going down the street, but I heard him tell Mr. Bramble he had just come in on the stage from Yankton Agency, and would be here for a day or two getting supplies for the detachment."

"Then we 'll be able to see him soon, Wallace," Mr. Smith remarked. "In the meanwhile we 'd better find a wholesale house and start getting our outfit

together. Where is the best store, Mr. Ash, for buying a stock of groceries and dry goods to take West?"

"Well," returned Mr. Ash, judicially, "there are several good wholesale houses in town. It 's hard to say which is best. But perhaps the place where you 'll find the most goods to select from for a general stock, is Bramble & Miner's. It 's three blocks from here on Second Street, near the steamboat landing. Go down this street, Broadway, then two blocks east. They can fit you out with wagons, too, if you want."

Mr. Smith and Wallace walked as directed to the store of Bramble & Miner. As they were going in the front entrance they passed a young fellow standing on the board walk before the store, who glanced keenly at them and particularly at Wallace, as they went by. He was dressed in rough clothes, very much worn and patched, but not ragged, and Wallace noticed him because of his muscular figure and erect carriage and the intelligence of his face, which contrasted strongly with the poverty of his attire. The newcomers found the store no less well

prepared to furnish them with an outfit than they had hoped. All kinds of groceries, hardware, dry goods, boots, shoes, and even agricultural implements—not fancy lines but staples—were there to select from; and this firm as well as other similar ones in town were frequently receiving large orders by the steamboats from St. Louis, and shipping out others to supply customers, like the Smiths, who were freighting retail stocks for country stores at points up and down the Missouri Valley.

Wallace remained in the store for about an hour with his father and Mr. Bramble, occasionally being consulted, while they discussed kinds and quantities of goods which ought to be taken to a place like Bozeman and figured and agreed on prices. Then, finding that his constant presence did not seem to be necessary during this stage of the outfitting, Wallace went out to take a look at the town and find Captain Tripp, if possible. As he paused on the sidewalk and looked up and down the street, uncertain which way to turn, he saw that the youth he had noticed on entering the store was still there, leaning back now against a hitching post, whittling a

stick. He did not glance up, but Wallace suddenly became aware that he had spoken. What he said was, "Hello, Yank!"

The speaker remained so perfectly impassive that Wallace, looking at him in surprise, for a moment doubted his ears. Wallace was still wearing his blue uniform. The threadbare attire of the other gave no suggestion of ever having been a uniform of any color, for it was of civilian cut. But Wallace, guessing the truth, presently replied, good-naturedly, "Hello, Johnnie!"

Instantly the other looked up into his eyes with a smile.

"How long since yo' quit trampin' with Shehman and Schofield?" he inquired.

"About six weeks," Wallace answered. "You must have been in the secret service. "How do you know I was with Schofield?"

"Reckon I 've said 'howdy' to the Twenty-third Ahmy Corps times enough to know theyah badge when I see it," returned the other.

Then Wallace remembered the red enameled shield on the front of his forage cap, the emblem of the

First Division of the Twenty-third Army Corps, commanded by General John M. Schofield. He laughed. "You 'll do, Johnnie," said he. "You must have had quite a journey getting way up here yourself."

"Cleah f'om Bentonville," said the other. "The night afteh that ahgument with you-all, I made up my mind the Southe'n Confederacy wa'n't goin' to need soldiehs much longeh, anyhow, and that afteh she petehed out they 'd be a heap mo' Johnnies huntin' fo' jobs than they would be jobs huntin' fo' Johnnies. So I reckoned I 'd get a little ahead and avoid the rush. That 's why I 'm heah now, huntin' a job. Do you know of any, Yank?"

Wallace was no bitter partisan. His unceasing loyalty to the Union embraced no feeling of personal animosity toward those who had fought on the other side. Taking a quick mental measure of the young fellow before him he realized that he liked the lad's appearance and manner. His face was intelligent, his eyes keen, and in spite of his soft Southern drawl and a certain deliberation in his movements, he looked capable of plenty of energy on occasion. So,

to his last question, Wallace finally replied, "I might know of one, Johnnie, but I can't say for sure till tomorrow. Do you want to stay here in Yankton?"

"I want wo'k, that 's all; don't caih whetheh it keeps me heah aw takes me to China."

"What 's your name?"

"Vance Lytle; Vance is good enough."

"Mine is Wallace Smith. Where are you stopping?"

The other smiled, one corner of his mouth going up and the other down, as if his thoughts were divided between amusement and irony.

"I 'm seldom at my apahtments except at night," he answered, "but just now I 'm stayin' at the Riveh-side Hotel, sometimes called the steamboat wahe-house—wheneveh they 's a coil of rope handy foh a pillow."

Wallace smiled, too, but behind the smile was sympathy.

"That 's too bad," he said, simply. "If you don't get a job before then, be around here tomorrow morning and I 'll see if I can do anything for you."

He started up the street, then turned again, thrusting his hand in his pocket.

"Are you getting enough to eat?" he asked, noting the gauntness of the other's face for the first time.

Vance Lytle gave him a glance in which pride and reproach were mingled. "Plenty to keep me goin' till I have wohk, thank you," he replied, stiffly, and Wallace, feeling an uncomfortable consciousness of having been too inquisitive, walked away.

A few moments later he encountered Captain Tripp, two or three blocks up Third Street, the main thoroughfare, and after recalling himself to that officer, received a kindly greeting. From him Wallace learned that only a detachment of about twenty-five men from Company B, under Lieutenant John R. Wood, were to go to Montana. The Captain had very recently received orders from General Sully to have this detachment cross the Missouri at Yankton Agency and had himself come down to Yankton for the purpose of forwarding some necessary supplies to Lieutenant Wood's force.

This was not the last stroll Wallace took on the streets of the young city, for, though very busy as-

sisting his father during the next three days, he still managed to slip away occasionally to catch further glimpses of the varied life which animated the capital of Dakota. Here were to be found among the Territorial officials permanently residing in Yankton and among those visiting the town on governmental matters, many men prominent in the nation. Army officers from the forts upriver or others employed on staff duty, rubbed elbows on the streets with pioneer farmers, with frontier desperadoes, with Indians, missionary ministers of the Gospel, army sutlers, fur traders, steamboat men, townsite boomers, bull-train freighters, promoters of a thousand more or less visionary schemes for extracting sudden wealth from the wilderness, and many other types and characters to be encountered only on the border land of civilization. Even among such a strange medley, however, the substantial majority was still made up of those sturdy men from the Eastern and Middle-Western States who have furnished the backbone of every new community in the American West; men who had come with their families to the new land and had come to stay.

While they were eating supper on the evening of their first day in Yankton, Wallace told his father of his conversation with Vance Lytle. Mr. Smith was well pleased with Wallace's description of the young Southerner.

"I was asking Mr. Bramble to-day about teamsters," said he. "With four wagons we shall need at least two drivers. Bramble says plenty of men can be found who are anxious to get out to the mines and can be hired as teamsters at reasonable wages; but the trouble is, they are mostly an unreliable lot, likely to desert when we reach the edge of Montana and leave us in the lurch. Perhaps this young Lytle is a better sort, and he might like a chance to go out. I 'll talk to him tomorrow, if he comes around."

Mr. Smith and Wallace reached the store early next morning, intending to look over their new wagons and discuss problems of loading them to the best advantage, before the store should open for business. Vance Lytle was already there, waiting for them.

"Good morning," said Wallace. "You 're an early bird."

"They did n't make my bed ve'y comf'table last night at the Rivehside," returned Vance. "They wa'n't even a coil o' rope to repose my haid on, so I arose eahly."

His promptness at the appointed meeting-place was in itself a good sign, and a few questions, together with a moment's observation, satisfied Mr. Smith that the young Southerner would probably make as good an employé as he would be apt to find. So, as Vance readily agreed to go to Montana at the modest wages offered, in five minutes more he was standing with them beside the new wagons, apparently as much interested as they in planning for the journey. Indeed, his suggestions for economizing space and balancing loads were so practical that at last Mr. Smith said, "You seem to be pretty familiar with handling freight wagons."

Vance smiled in his peculiar, half amused, half ironic way, as he replied, "I picked up some points last summeh, I reckon, when I was detailed with

Joe Johnston's quahte'masteh's trains from Dalton down to the Chattahoochee. Ouh wagons wa'n't any too many, you know, an' we had to pack 'em tight."

Presently Mr. Smith and Wallace started back to the Ash Hotel for breakfast. Vance remained standing by the wagons until Wallace turned back and said to him:

"Have you had your breakfast yet, Vance?"

"Not—yet," admitted Vance, with some reluctance.

"Come on and have it with us, then," said Mr. Smith.

"Oh, no, thank yo', seh," replied Vance, though it was plain to see that he found it hard to refuse.

Wallace walked back to him. "Aw, come on, Johnnie," he urged. "It 's nothing but a question of hardtack and bacon; if our haversacks are full and yours is empty, you won't refuse a share, will you?"

Vance gave him a grateful sidelong glance but did not answer. Instead he walked over to Mr. Smith and thrusting his hand into an inside breast pocket, brought forth a gold watch, so handsome and obvi-

ously so valuable that Mr. Smith and Wallace almost exclaimed with surprise. It was amazing to find this poverty-stricken youth in possession of such a piece of jewelry.

"Misteh Smith," said Vance, slowly, "I haven't any money; they 's no use denyin' it. If you 'll advance me a little, seh, on wages—say ten dollahs—you can take this fo' secu'ity."

He held out the watch, but as Mr. Smith hesitated, hardly knowing what to say, he went on:

"It 's the last thing I have, seh, and I would n't lose it foh the wohld. I know you 'll keep it safe fo' me, now I 'm wo'king fo' you-all. It 's my fatheh's watch; he was killed at Ezra Chu'ch."

The last words were spoken in a low tone as he opened the front cover of the case and showed them the engraved inscription on the inside, "Vance Lytle from his loving wife, Virginia Randolph Lytle, Dec. 25, 1849."

Mr. Smith looked up at the shabbily-dressed figure before him with a new expression of interest and compassion in his face.

"Keep your father's watch, lad," he said, kindly,

drawing out his wallet and extracting three five dollar bills therefrom. "I have no doubt of your honesty. Here are fifteen dollars advance wages. Will it be enough?"

"Oh, yes, seh, thank you," Vance replied, his face lighting with gratitude.

"You may need some things before we start—perhaps some more clothes," Mr. Smith went on.

"I reckon these'll do me a while yet," returned Vance. "But I would like to get a few things, fo' shuah, an' now I can."

"Well, come on to breakfast with us, anyhow," insisted Wallace, so hospitably that Vance yielded, and the three walked on together into the Ash Hotel.

Word reached Yankton early in the day that Sawyer's train was ready to start from the Niobrara, the greater part of its escort, detailed from elsewhere, being already with it, while it was understood that it would not wait for the Dakota cavalry, depending upon the latter to catch up.

The Smiths therefore redoubled their efforts to complete their outfit, and by sunrise of the morning of June twelfth, thanks to great exertion, their four

wagons were standing on the north bank of the Missouri at the foot of Capitol Street, waiting to pass over the river. But their readiness to cross was no assurance that they would be able to do so very promptly; Wallace and his father realized the fact keenly as they stood on the caving edge of the sandbar and watched the ferry boat, a large, flat-bottomed skiff propelled by four oarsmen each handling one long sweep oar, come sidling slowly across from the Nebraska shore, struggling against the swift current at every stroke. Each of their four wagons contained nearly a ton and a half of freight, and they were to be coupled together in pairs, so that three span of oxen should draw two wagons, as Mr. Smith had learned that the other wagons with the Sawyer train were to be handled in this way. The twelve oxen, as well as an extra span for use in case of accident, were standing with the wagons on the river bank in charge of two drivers, one of them being Vance Lytle and the other a young man whom Mr. Smith had picked up the day before. Mr. Smith viewed the approaching boat with some dismay. "Bramble and Miner both told me that the German

ferryman here, Sabie Strahm, had a ferry boat large enough to carry a wagon," he said, "but I don't see it."

"Something must have happened to it," returned Wallace, thrusting his hands in his pockets and gloomily eyeing the ferryboat. "I 've seen Sherman's wagon trains get across the Carolina rivers by fording and on pontoons and trestle bridges, and every other way. But, by George, I don't see how we 're going to get this outfit over such a river as the Missouri on that little old rowboat, without either losing a lot of stuff or being delayed for a week here."

Both of them scanned the long stretches of sandbar on the Dakota side and the shore of Nebraska, far away across the muddy, drift-covered river, but no vestige of a flatboat was visible.

"Probably it is somewhere out of sight and will be brought over in a little while," Mr. Smith remarked, hopefully.

A moment later the skiff scraped up on the sand at their feet, and the steersman, a short, plump man with a fringe of light brown whiskers surround-

ing a ruddy face, jumped ashore. "Guten morgen!" said he, briefly, casting a glance of satisfaction at the array of wagons and oxen before him. "You vant to cross der rifer py?"

"Yes," returned Mr. Smith, "we want to cross as quickly as possible. We 're going West with Colonel Sawyer's train. Where 's your flatboat?"

"Dot flatpoat is on der bottom off dis Pig Muddy," Strahm answered, calmly. "She done hiet a snag gestern, und rip a plank her pottom oud of. It vill been zwei, drei days' vork to raise him oop und fix him vonce again, yet."

"Then how on earth are we to get all this stuff over?" asked Mr. Smith, in dismay.

"Vy, take him in der skiff, sicherlich," Strahm returned, apparently much surprised at the question. Then, seeing that further explanation was necessary, he went on, "Der freight ve shall carry in lots off a t'ousand pounts py a time—no more vill der skiff carry. Die vagons shall be tooken abart und carried dot same vay, und die gattle shall svim. How mooch you haf got dem vagons in, eh?"

"About three thousand pounds in each one."

The ferryman considered for a moment. "It vill take someding like tventy trips," he said finally, "at ein thaler a trip. To go und den gome pack, loating und unloating, vill take drei-qvarters off an hour."

"The price is high enough," said Mr. Smith, "but I won't stick at that provided you can get everything across to-day."

"Dot is not to pe done," said the other, who evidently fully appreciated the advantages of his position. "Der rifer is oop und swift running, und we may not always go so qvick like we tink. Put py tomorrow morgen it is all agross I guess, yes."

"Well, if that 's the best that can be done, let 's get started," exclaimed Mr. Smith. "Vance," he called, "bring that first wagon of yours—the one with dry-goods—down here close to the bank, back end to the landing."

With a great deal of geeing and hawing and vigorous assistance by the other men at the wheels, which sunk deep in the sand, Vance finally got the wagon to the desired position. Then all hands, including the oarsmen of the ferry boat, began un-

loading boxes, bundles, and crates and stowing them in the skiff, until Sabie Strahm called a halt.

"Enough is a blenty for von trip, und dot is it," he said. "Ve vill swamp py der mittle off der rifer if ve don't vatch oudt a leetle."

The cargo consisted of about one-third of the contents of the first wagon, but when the boat started out from the bank it was evident she was carrying all she was fit for, as her gunwale was within a few inches of the water, and she handled so clumsily in the current that she had drifted nearly a half-mile down stream before she finally reached the opposite bank. It was nearly an hour before she returned, the emigrant party meantime sitting impatiently on the bank waiting for her. When she came she brought a passenger, a horseman, who sat in the stern and held the bridle of his animal, which swam behind the boat. He was on his way to Sioux City from the mouth of the Niobrara, where he had been on some business connected with the wagon train.

"I left Sawyer's outfit yesterday noon," he said in answer to questions. "They were nearly ready and calculate to start tomorrow morning."

"Is the Dakota cavalry with them yet?" asked Wallace.

"No, but they won't wait for the cavalry."

Wallace and his father looked at one another.

"At the rate we 've made so far we won't get all the stuff over before tomorrow night," said Wallace, "and then it 'll take us two days to reach the Niobrara. We 'll be in luck if we find even the cavalry then. It won't be any joke if Indians should catch us twenty or thirty miles out behind that train."

They resumed work with redoubled energy and by noon had the contents of one wagon and the wagon itself all across. It had been necessary to take the latter to pieces, carrying the wheels and body over on one trip, and the box, cover and running parts on the next, reassembling the wagon and reloading it on the Nebraska side. By the use of lead lines a pair of oxen could be made to swim across behind the boat on each trip; and so, when darkness fell, the stock was all over except Mr. Smith's and Wallace's riding horses, and two wagons with contents complete had also been carried across. Wallace and Vance

crossed in the last boat to spend the night with the property on the Nebraska side, while Mr. Smith and the other driver, who gave his name as Jack Dowd, remained with that still on the Yankton shore.

It took seven more trips with the skiff next morning to get everything across, and it was two o'clock in the afternoon before the wagons were entirely reloaded and the little train ready to move out westward. But even with such a late start, twelve miles across the prairie hills were covered by dark, the outfit traveling on the road running from Sioux City to Niobrara City, a hamlet near the mouth of the Niobrara River.

CHAPTER III

THE WILDERNESS ROAD

THE following morning at the first streak of dawn, Wallace roused the rest of the party, breakfast was hastily prepared, and by six o'clock the cattle were inspanned and the wagons again in motion. To the impatient men, eager to overtake the main column which they were following, the lumbering pace of the cattle seemed exasperatingly slow. Yet they realized that they must undoubtedly be making much better time on the average than Colonel Sawyer's men; for the latter, they knew, as soon as they left Niobrara City, must have begun picking a road as they went which would be suitable for later travelers to follow, grading it in bad places, and building fords or bridges over streams. The Smiths, on the other hand, were able to move without hesitation along the Niobrara road, a thoroughfare which, though practically unimproved, was generally

good by nature, as most upland prairie roads are. When the necessity for resting and grazing their animals compelled them to camp about four P. M., they had covered, as nearly as they could judge, about twenty miles, and were probably about eight miles from Niobrara City.

Sure enough, after another early start the following day, at about ten o'clock they drove into Niobrara City, a village of very small proportions comfortably nestled in a timbered bottom close to the Missouri. Niobrara City was not only the furthest outpost of civilization for hundreds of miles to the westward, but it was also quite a patriarch among the settlements of the region; it was already nine years of age, having been settled in 1856, two years before Yankton, though it could by no means boast the size or commercial activity of the capital of Dakota.

The wagons halted in front of the general store, and Mr. Smith walked over and spoke to a judicial-looking individual who was leaning against the wall, eating a raw turnip with marked deliberation and much relish.

"When did Colonel Sawyer's train leave here?" asked Mr. Smith.

"Well, now, I could n't say exactly when it did start," returned the other, speaking slowly and evidently giving careful consideration to his words. "I was down to his camp at the time, too, but, ye see, I ain't got a watch, and I did n't think to ask nobody, not knowin' as anybody would want to know from me afterwards, ye see. But it could n't of been over fifteen minutes either side of two o'clock in the afternoon."

"But what day?" asked Mr. Smith. "I don't care about the hour."

"Oh, what day?" returned the judicial one, cutting off a liberal slice of turnip and stowing it in his cheek. "It was last Tuesday, the thirteenth."

"Have you any idea how far they have gotten by now?"

"Well, now, I would n't undertake to say. I did n't go with 'em any beyond their camp over here on the Niobrara. But the feller that lives down in that cabin,"—he pointed to a small log dwelling about three hundred feet distant,—"he went out

with 'em to Verdigris Creek, where they camped last night. Maybe he could tell you."

"How far is Verdigris Creek from here?" asked Mr. Smith, patiently, determined, if possible, to extract some real facts from this compendium of useless information.

"Well, now, to tell you the truth, I don't exactly know. There was a surveying party here last summer that ran a line to the Verdigris. August nineteenth was the day they were here. Let me see, the name of the surveyor was—"

"My friend," interrupted Mr. Smith, kindly, but firmly, "just tell me, please, *about* how far it is."

"Well, now, I 'd hate to say," declared the other, almost forgetting to chew turnip in his earnest desire to be accurate. "But, let me see; just at a guess, understand, I 'd make it ten-and-a-half miles, maybe ten-and-three-quarters. On the 7th of July, year before last, at half-past nine in the morning, I started to the Verdigris with—"

"Thank you," said Mr. Smith, hastily backing away to avoid a further rush of explanations. "We want to catch that train and must hurry." With

that he gave the word to Vance Lytle to start ahead, and as they passed from view the turnip-eater still stood looking after them, doubtless wondering how they dared to proceed along the road with so little accurate information to guide them.

By noon the wagons had reached the well-worn camp ground of the Sawyer expedition on the bank of the Niobrara, where they halted for lunch and a brief rest, then turning south along the east bank of the river, pushed on to the Verdigris, crossing it by a good ford which had evidently been made by the expedition ahead of them, and camping on its further bank.

During the night a heavy thunderstorm, accompanied by a deluge of rain, tested the new wagon covers thoroughly and proved them satisfactorily waterproof. It was nearly three o'clock next afternoon, after they had rounded the bend where the Niobrara swings westward on its long course toward the mountains, when Vance, who was driving the leading team, called to Mr. Smith: "Looks to me, seh, like wagons away down yondah in that valley ahead."

"You 're right, Vance," returned his employer, after bringing his field glasses into play. "It 's the train, all right, and it 's gone into camp. We shall be able to reach them in an hour or so."

As the four wagons drew near to the large corral of the main expedition, comfortably located in the grassy bottom on the west side of a small, timbered creek, many men walked out and watched the approach of the newcomers, much surprised by their appearance. Upon crossing the substantial bridge over the creek just finished by Colonel Sawyer's men, and driving toward the corral, the Smiths were surrounded by a crowd, eager to know who they were and whence they had come. Before long Colonel Sawyer came up and introduced himself to Mr. Smith.

"How did you find the road from Niobrara on?" he asked, smiling.

"Very good," Mr. Smith answered; "your men have certainly done excellent work so far."

"You are the first actual travelers to follow the Sawyer road thus far since it 's been laid out, you know," remarked the Colonel, impressively. "But

the future will see it used by countless thousands from the East into Montana."

The corral being already formed, the Smiths' wagons were drawn up outside for the night, and the cattle turned into the main herd. While Wallace was driving the last team into the herd, he saw a young man in blue cavalry uniform, approaching. Wallace looked at him closely, then walked toward him with outstretched hand.

"Hello, Will Van Osdel," he exclaimed warmly. "I was in hopes you 'd be with this outfit, but I did n't know whether Company B had joined yet."

"We crossed the Missouri at Yankton Agency," explained Will, "and joined after Sawyer left the mouth of the Niobrara. Somebody told me a minute ago a fellow named Wallace Smith had just come in, so I started right out to hunt you up. Say, it 's good to see you again, boy. The last time was way up on the Yellowstone, last August, was n't it, just after we 'd finished starving and fighting through the Little Missouri Bad Lands? I 'll bet you 've seen a lot since then, eh?"

"I was with Sherman from Savannah to Durham

Station," answered Wallace. "The Eighth Minnesota did its share down there, I guess, even if we were pretty late getting started."

"Ever hear anything from Al Briscoe?" asked Will.

"Yes, I had a letter from him just before I left Fort Ridgely. He 'd passed his examinations for West Point and was going to start in this June; he 's probably beginning just about now."

"Great boy, Al is," declared Will. "He 'll make a general some day if he don't get killed first, running into ticklish holes."

"Well, he 'll be safe for four years, now, anyway," returned Wallace, laughing. "But, say, what 's in this Sawyer outfit, anyhow? It looks big enough to be safe from Indians."

"I don't know about that." Will's tone was dubious. "They say the redskins out toward the Big-horn Mountains have been pretty sassy all year; don't like the whites tramping around through their hunting country. There are troops out after them in that direction now, and we are supposed to join a column under Colonel Cole up here on the headwa-

ters of the Niobrara. He 's coming up the Loup Fork of the Platte. But I don't just see how he and Colonel Sawyer expect to make connections in this big wilderness."

"They have maps, have n't they?" asked Wallace.

"Yes, but who made the maps?" retorted Will. "Anybody that knows the country? It 's the easiest thing ever was to make a mistake of a few miles in this country, on maps, and throw you clear out of your calculations."

"Well, anyhow, what 's in this train?" asked Wallace, again.

"Oh, let 's see now," Will answered. "I figured out when we first got in, but I 've nearly forgotten. There 's twenty-five of us Dakota boys, under Lieutenant Wood, and two companies of the Fifth U. S. Volunteers—about one hundred and twenty men—under Captain Williford. He 's in command of all the escort."

"The Fifth U. S. Volunteers?" Wallace asked. "Are n't those some of the troops they call 'galvanized rebels'?"

"You bet they are," Van Osdel answered, laugh-

ing. "They 're rebel prisoners that enlisted to get out of prison on condition they 'd be sent West to fight Indians, and not South to fight the Secesh. There 's some pretty wild ones among 'em, but some good soldiers too. They have a couple of mountain howitzers with them. Then there 's Sawyer's own party of road-builders, something over fifty men, with fifteen wagons and forty-five yoke of oxen. The escort 's got twenty-five wagons, hauled by six mules each. But the big bulk of the train"—he turned and swept his hand toward the circle of wagons forming the corral—"you can see, are freight wagons. There 's three dozen of 'em, strung together, like yours, in pairs, with six yoke of oxen to each pair, and they belong to C. E. Hedges and Co., of Sioux City."

"That 's more than eighty wagons," reflected Wallace, "and about one hundred and fifty men in the escort and perhaps another hundred in the train." He shook his head. "A pretty thin force for this kind of a trip, Will. You know in the army it 's figured that a train of a hundred wagons ought to have a guard of five hundred men, anyhow, when

they are where there 's the least danger of attack. That 's not counting drivers, either."

"Well, I hope we don't run into Indians, that 's all," said Van Osdel; "not till after Colonel Cole joins us, anyway. Some of the men in the expedition are getting scared already. Two fellows slid out some way this noon and deserted. Captain Williford sent a squad to hunt for them, but they 're gone, all right. Let 's go back to camp."

That evening Wallace spent an hour or two very pleasantly with the detachment of Dakota Cavalry, among whom were a number of men he had known the previous year when campaigning under General Sully on the upper Missouri. Wallace and his father also had an interview with Nat Hedges, a pleasant young fellow who was in charge of the train of freight wagons belonging to his brothers, and agreed with him always to drive their wagons immediately in rear of his train, so as to keep the freight-hauling part of the expedition all together in the column. Though only nineteen years of age, this young man's maturity and business capacity were

evident in the assured confidence with which he handled the duties of his responsible position; and as time passed, it became evident that his elder brothers had made no mistake in entrusting their train to his charge.

At about 3:30 next morning, the whole camp was aroused violently from slumber by the breaking of a terrific thunderstorm, which came up so suddenly that the herded cattle took alarm and began to stampede. The herders succeeded in stopping most of them, but a number escaped in the darkness and scattered out over the prairie. Within an hour the rain abated, and as the gray light of dawn began to illuminate the landscape, Wallace and Vance saddled the two horses belonging to the Smiths, and mounted to join the search for the missing stock. Mr. Smith offered to go, but Wallace said, "You stay here with the wagons, father. Vance and I can help round up the strays. Where 's Jack Dowd?"

"I don't know," Mr. Smith replied. "I have n't seen him for fifteen minutes. Maybe he 's gone out already to hunt up stock."

"I reckon not," drawled Vance; "mo' likely Misteh Dowd 's thought he might have to go, and so he 's suppohtin' the ahtillery."

"Under an ammunition wagon in the rear, eh?" laughed Wallace. "Have you got him sized up that way, Vance?"

"I sho'ly have," Vance returned, as they rode away. "Misteh Dowd has done confided to me thet he 's got an instinctive abhoh'ence fo' Injuns."

In a ravine over a mile away the boys found three oxen grazing, one of them being an animal of their own. As they were driving the oxen back to camp, they encountered Nat Hedges, accompanied by three of his drivers, also looking for stock.

"You 've had luck," said he to Wallace and Vance. "Thanks for your help. Two of those cattle you 're driving belong to my train; you see the brand. But I 'm still short seven head."

"If one of your men will drive these cattle into camp, we 'll go on and help you hunt the rest," suggested Wallace.

The words had hardly left his lips when all three

of Hedges' men, with singular eagerness, volunteered to go back to the corral.

Young Hedges smiled quietly, told one of them to take the cattle back, then, accompanied by Wallace and Vance, with his two remaining men riding behind them, turned back toward the ravine in which the strays had been found.

"Your fellows don't seem to enjoy hunting stock this morning," Wallace remarked in a low tone to Hedges.

The latter shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "They 've got Injun fever," he replied. "It 's ridiculous. There 're no Indians around here."

On reaching the ravine, which contained enough timber and underbrush to afford some concealment, they turned towards its head and searched it from end to end. They found no stock; but when they came out on the open prairie beyond, Hedges' two drivers were nowhere to be seen.

Wallace laughed. "What do you think of that?" he exclaimed. "They 've straggled back to camp."

Nat Hedges was half angry and half amused.

"Is n't that the worst you ever saw?" he asked. "What shall we do with such cowards if we ever really do get in a tight place?"

"Put a line of file-closers behind 'em with orders to use clubbed muskets on the first skulker," suggested Wallace, glancing at Vance.

"Only trouble with that is," said Vance, "ouh file-closehs 'll have to be in the firin' line, same as we-all's wehe at Bentonville."

In the next ravine two more of Hedges' cattle were found, but that was all; so these were driven to camp, where it was learned that others had found the remainder of the missing animals. Jack Dowd, meanwhile, had put in an appearance, announcing that he had been hunting strays down along the Niobrara. At this explanation Mr. Smith smiled and said nothing, for he needed the driver, and it was useless to dispute his word. At seven A. M. the train started onward again.

So, with occasional variations, day followed day, as the expedition made its slow way westward, averaging not more than twelve miles' travel daily, owing to the frequent delays for Colonel Sawyer's pioneers

to build fords or bridges across streams, or to grade rough places.

June passed, and then July, ushered in by excessively hot weather when sometimes the thermometer registered as high as 106 degrees in the shade in the early afternoon; mules or oxen were prostrated daily by the heat. Game was plentiful and the escort so often brought down antelope or buffalo that the men fared, literally, on the fat of the land. A score of creeks entering the Niobrara from the south were bridged or their natural fords improved; at length, south of the Black Hills of Dakota, the Niobrara itself was crossed, and the train turned northwestward across the divide to White River, and thence to the South Fork of the Big Cheyenne. At this point a mounted detachment of the escort under Lieutenant Dana left the train and went southward to Fort Laramie, distant about seventy-five miles. Here information was obtained that a military column of about eight hundred men under General Patrick Connor, which had been sent up into the country east of the Bighorn Mountains to establish a fort for the protection of the new Bozeman Road and to clear

the region of hostile Indians, was now operating on the Powder River, a tributary of the Yellowstone. Lieutenant Dana overtook the train after an absence of ten days, during which time Colonel Sawyer had proceeded slowly northwestward about one hundred miles and reached a point on the Dry Fork of the Cheyenne.

Nothing, meanwhile, had been seen or heard of Colonel Cole's column, which had been expected to meet the Sawyer train on the South Cheyenne. Lacking information, therefore, of the whereabouts of any force, excepting General Connor's, Colonel Sawyer determined to strike northwest, directly for the Powder River, passing to the north of Pumpkin Buttes, a series of high elevations, famous as landmarks throughout that broad prairie region. For some days this course was pursued. But water became extremely scarce, and the country grew more and more rough. Finally, one afternoon, when the cattle had been practically without water for two days, the train was corralled and the whole herd, under guard of the cavalry, was driven fifteen miles to Powder River. So wild were the cattle for water

that when they reached the stream they threw themselves over a bluff bank nearly twenty feet high into the river and drank until it seemed they must kill themselves. Yet none were injured, and during the night they were all driven safely back to camp. This trip to Powder River revealed the fact that all the country in that direction was cut up by "bad lands," and Colonel Sawyer was forced to change his plans and turn the train back to seek a more practicable route south of Pumpkin Buttes.

CHAPTER IV

SACRIFICES TO CIVILIZATION

IT was now nearly the middle of August. The train had traveled almost five hundred miles and had not yet encountered any Indians, though everyone knew that for hundreds of miles they had been passing through hostile territory, where all their movements were doubtless being watched by Indian lookouts. Yet all that the white men had actually seen to confirm this belief was occasional pony tracks and, on a few occasions, fleeting glimpses caught by the scouts, of two or three mounted Indians in the distance, just vanishing from view. The morning of August 13, when the train started back, dawned cloudless and sultry, and the heat increased as the sun rose higher.

"Whew!" exclaimed Wallace, who was riding with his father beside one of their wagons, mopping the perspiration from his face, as Nat Hedges rode

up beside him, "is n't this a scorcher? Seems to me it 's even hotter than some of those days back on the Niobrara."

"Hot enough, all right," returned Hedges, "but it would be great growing weather for corn if there were any corn around here. Anyway, we 'll soon have a chance for a rest in the shade of a wagon. The head of my train is starting into corral now up here by some little springs that the escort found. We want to water our stock, and you had better do the same; but the cattle will churn these springs into mud in no time. My wagon-master is looking after my train, and I came back to ask you, Wallace, if you want to ride over to that hill"—he pointed to a ridge about a mile and a half distant—"and see if we can find any water the other side of it. We might start up an antelope, too. I remember seeing some over this way when we went past here three days ago."

"Certainly I 'll go," returned Wallace. "You 've never found me backward when there was a chance for game, have you?"

"Never," Hedges answered. "That 's why I came after you."

"Shall we start now, before dinner?" asked Wallace.

"Sure, it 's only twenty-five after eleven," replied Hedges, looking at his watch. "If we don't find water or antelope, we 'll be back by twelve. Get your gun."

Wallace went to one of the wagons and secured his sixteen-shot Henry rifle, which he had often used before on hunting excursions in company with Nat Hedges and others.

"Try to be back by twelve-thirty, anyway, Wallace," said Mr. Smith, as they rode away. "Vance and I will have dinner ready before that."

The hunters put their horses to a sharp gallop, and in a few moments were over the hill and skirting the edge of the ravine, whose sides were abrupt, and which a few rods farther on joined another ravine coming down from the opposite side.

"Pshaw! There 's no water here!" exclaimed Hedges, "nor game either. We might as well go back. But first I want to take a look into that other ravine."

He urged his horse down the bank to cross over to

the farther depression; but Wallace, remembering from previous experience in the Indian country, the dangers that often lurk in such places, pulled in his own mount and called: "I would n't go down there, Nat, if I were you. You might run into Indians."

"Oh, I guess not," Hedges answered. "I 'll just take a look."

Wallace watched him ride along the bottom of the nearer ravine to its junction with the other one. Then he jerked up his horse sharply and stood for an instant as if transfixed. The next moment he wheeled and dug the spurs so hard into the sides of his riding animal that the latter leaped forward wildly. But simultaneously three or four rifle shots rang out, accompanied by a chorus of blood-curdling war whoops. Hedges came tearing up the slope; and Wallace, totally forgetful of his own safety, started toward him. But, before he had gone ten feet a crowd of mounted Indians, how many he could not tell, but at least a dozen, came galloping from the ravine behind Hedges, shooting and yelling. Just as Hedges reached the crest of the hill, a few

yards from Wallace, the latter, with a horror which seemed part of some dreadful nightmare, saw his friend reel in his saddle and fall headlong to the ground, while his terrified horse raced straight away toward the distant wagon train. Wallace had no chance to go to the aid of his fallen comrade, whom the Indians had already surrounded and hidden from his view.

A number of the warriors leveled their weapons at Wallace and sent bullets whistling within a few inches of him, while others came rushing toward him. He realized that he could do nothing for Hedges, who was doubtless already beyond all earthly aid; he saw, moreover, that he could save his own life only by instant flight, if, indeed, he could save it at all. Wheeling his horse and throwing himself far forward on the animal's neck, he struck in the spurs and fled like an arrow toward the train, which he could distinctly see across the level prairie.

Because of their delay around Nat Hedges, Wallace was several hundred yards away before the Indians started in pursuit, for they had paused to

fire at him before giving chase. They were still uncomfortably close, but Wallace quickly saw that his long-legged American horse would outdistance the Indian ponies, unless one of the wild shots fired by his pursuers should happen to strike him or his horse, which seemed unlikely. So he straightened up, and turning in his saddle began firing at the Indians, not so much in the hope of killing any of them as to cause them to slack speed a little and, more than all, instantly to warn the train of what was coming.

But the Indians did not slack up, for they had discovered something which Wallace had not had time to observe, that a number of loose horses were being herded some distance out from the wagon train. As Wallace came tearing up to the corral, he saw these horses for the first time. They were the animals of the Dakota Cavalry, which had been turned out for a hasty feed. Their herders strove desperately to drive them to the shelter of the wagons, as the Indians veered off from their vain pursuit of Wallace and, with waving buffalo robes and wild yells, bore down upon the horses. All was

confusion in the camp. Men were shouting and swearing as they seized their weapons and ran out toward the herd, firing at the Indians as they went. Wallace, instinctively acting upon the habits of discipline he had acquired in the army, galloped up to Captain Williford, commander of the escort, who was in front of the train, forming the companies of the Fifth U. S. Volunteers in skirmish line, and reported.

"Mr. Hedges and I were attacked about a mile and a half from camp by twenty or more Indians, sir. Hedges is killed, I 'm afraid. I saw him fall, and the enemy surrounded him."

"I 'll send a party after him in a minute," returned the escort commander, calmly. "See if you can gather up some mounted men to help the cavalry save their horses."

Wallace rushed away and riding around the circle of wagons soon came to those belonging to his father. He found Mr. Smith and Vance struggling to unyoke the six ox-teams, which were plunging about in terror at the firing and general confusion.

"Where 's Dowd?" Wallace asked as he stopped beside Mr. Smith.

"In that third wagon," answered his father. "I can't get him out."

Wallace's face turned white with anger and contempt.

"I 'll get him out!" he exclaimed. Jumping from his horse he strode to the rear of the wagon in question and thrust the muzzle of his rifle through the opening. Dowd, his lower jaw trembling and his weak face contorted with abject fear, was huddled on top of the boxes within.

"You disgraceful coward!" exclaimed Wallace, "get out of here and help my father or I 'll put a hole through you! You can't soldier like this every time there 's an Indian within a mile. Get out, now!"

Dowd began to beg, but Wallace's stern glance intimidated him. He climbed out and going forward to Mr. Smith began helping to unhitch the teams. Wallace rode over to Vance, who was faithfully sticking to his post with the oxen, but whose eyes were glowing with excitement as he looked at Wal-

lace and exclaimed, appealingly: "Oh, say, Yank, cain't I get into this, now you have done got that skedaddleh to help yo' fatheh?"

"Just what I want, Johnnie," he answered, "get your rifle, jump on my father's horse, and come with me."

Vance, whose weapon was one of the long Government Springfield rifles which had been issued to Colonel Sawyer by General Sully before the expedition left Niobrara City, obeyed with alacrity, and in much less time than it has taken to tell it the two boys were riding rapidly along the train, calling for volunteers to join them and help out the cavalry. A dozen men were quickly gathered and they all galloped toward the herd. The dismounted troopers, meanwhile, had rushed out, but too late to save all the horses, even though a number of the latter, headed by Will Van Osdel's well-trained animal, had themselves galloped into the corral at the first appearance of danger. As Wallace and Vance came on the scene the Indians were already riding away, leading with them eight horses wearing halters and ropes, which they had succeeded in cutting

from the herd. Followed at breakneck speed by twenty or thirty soldiers and civilians, who were strung out for half a mile behind them, the hostiles fled toward the hill where they had shot Nat Hedges, and over and away beyond it.

After following them for nearly three miles the white men, seeing they could not overtake their dusky foes, and fearing to run into an ambush, gave up the chase and rode back to the hill where lay the body of the unfortunate Hedges. It had been scalped and terribly mutilated, but was now tenderly lifted from the ground, carried to the corral, and placed in a wagon to be taken to the next day's camping place for burial.

The death of the genial, light-hearted young freight-master threw a feeling of gloom and foreboding over the entire camp. He had seemed so strong and vigorous and full of life, so far removed from the possibility of such an appalling fate as had overtaken him, that the men of the train, especially those who had never witnessed the impartial sacrifices of the battle field, asked themselves what guarantee of safety there was for any of them from

the stealthy foe that lurked in the unknown vastnesses of hill and plain by which they were surrounded. As for Wallace, his sorrow over his friend's untimely taking off was not less sincere because it carried with it no particular misgivings of future ill.

"Poor old Nat!" said he to his father the next afternoon, as they turned away from the grave into which the rude coffin of wagon boards containing Hedges' remains, had just been lowered. "If only he had n't gone down into that ravine he might have been alive now. But how can anyone tell when he 's walking straight into danger? I called to Nat, it 's true, but I might have done just the same thing myself."

The grave had been made in the center of the corral, where the stock would trample over it all night and obliterate every trace of its location; the only way to insure that it would not be desecrated by the Indians after the train's departure. The hours of darkness passed without any alarm, though the pickets were on the alert. But at dawn the camp was roused by the guards with the news

that Indians were near. The Smiths and their drivers arose from their blankets under the wagons, and as they did so Mr. Smith looked at the low hills around the camp, still only dimly discernible in the uncertain light. He uttered a startled exclamation and looked again. "For Heaven's sake, Wallace," said he, "are those Indians on the hills, all those dark spots?"

"Yes, sir, they are," answered Wallace. "That looks a little as it did on the morning I was wounded in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri. We 're going to have a stiff skirmish to sharpen our appetites for breakfast."

"But where have they come from so suddenly?" asked Mr. Smith.

"Just gathered in from every direction, I suppose, as soon as they found there was a train to attack," Wallace answered.

As if to give immediate confirmation to his words a half-dozen rifle shots rang out, then the soldiers of the escort and the teamsters of the train, as they hastily caught up their weapons, saw the dark patches on the hillside begin to move, flow together

into a mass, and come streaming down upon the lower ground toward the corral, preceded by a tempest of wolfish yells. A line of spitting flames ran along beside the wagons, and the pungent odor of powder smoke filled the nostrils of the men as with desperate energy they poured a disjointed fire into the charging horde of Indians. Still the latter came on, unshaken even by the shells from the howitzers. Among the wagons hardly a voice was raised either in command or ejaculation, for every nerve of the white men was strained, and every faculty absorbed, in the effort to shoot faster; each one realizing how thin their ranks were to defend a train so large as theirs. Until within fifty yards the Indians swept forward, before the steady fire of the defenders became more than they could bear, and breaking to right and left, they galloped along parallel with the front of the corral for a distance, yelling and shooting, and then doubled back to the hills, leaving a few dead ponies on the ground, but taking their dead and wounded comrades with them.

"Seems to me these redskins ahe n't so mighty slow," said Vance to Wallace when the enemy had

fallen back out of range. He was breathing hard as if from a severe physical effort. "That was no slouch of a chahge. They pined away a little too quick, that 's all."

"They can do lots better than that when they take a notion," replied Wallace. "They 'd have done it, too, if we 'd been strung out in column, and we might not have fared so well. But they know we 're too strong for 'em here."

Wallace's confident statement, however, did not seem to be entirely borne out by the events of the next few hours, for the enemy charged again and again, taking only brief intervals of rest between the attacks, each of which was directed at a different point in the circle of wagons, the Indians evidently hoping to find somewhere a weak or ill-defended spot.

By noon of that August day the men in the corral were dripping with sweat and grimy with powder smoke, but on the faces of the timid or inexperienced a pallor of deadly fear was visible beneath the dirt. The perpetual sweeping up and rolling back of the army of painted, feathered and howling

savages, seemed like never to cease; and as weariness came over the men they began to think that they were to be overwhelmed and wiped out, after all. The officers, Colonel Sawyer, Captain Williford, Lieutenants Dana, Marshall, Wood, and others, were everywhere, directing and encouraging. At about noon the Indians suddenly ceased firing, and a group of three or four appeared, unarmed, in front of the line and advanced toward the wagons, making signs for a parley. Colonel Sawyer, accompanied by the chief guide and interpreter, Ben Estes, went forward a short distance to meet them, while the remainder of the men rested on their arms, very glad of a breathing spell. After considerable talking and gesticulating, which could not be understood by the men in the corral, Colonel Sawyer and Estes came back and announced that the Indians would allow the train to proceed in consideration of a present to the warriors of a wagonload of bacon, sugar, coffee, flour, and tobacco. The tribute demanded was quickly gotten together and sent out to them, whereupon they retired a short distance, and the white men, much relieved, proceeded to prepare

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Several Indians held up their arms to invite a parley

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some food for themselves, by way of combined breakfast and dinner, before starting out again on the march. Before long the Indians began drawing near to the camp, some of them very friendly and smiling, but a few silent and sullen. A number manifested a desire to trade and beckoned the white men to come out.

"Not for me," said Wallace, positively, as he looked at them. "Those fellows are not to be trusted. If any of our boys go out, they 'll get hurt."

"You stay in too, Vance," said Mr. Smith. "There 's no use inviting trouble."

There was no need to caution Dowd, for he was inside the corral at a safe distance; but it must be admitted that under the stern eyes of Wallace, he had nerved himself sufficiently to do his share of the firing through the morning. A moment later one of Captain Williford's lieutenants walked along the line cautioning, in a low tone, "Don't go out among those Indians, men. The orders are positive. Stay where you are till we 're ready to start, and keep your guns handy."

There was to be no start that day, however, for presently Wallace and Vance saw, not far away, a number of the reckless men of the Dakota Cavalry, who either had not received or had not heeded the orders of the escort commander, walk out toward the Indians, laughing and making signs to them. For some little time they remained out, trading tobacco, coffee, and other articles for moccasins, beaded pouches, or anything else the Indians had to offer. The boys had almost begun to think the conduct of the cavalry not so foolhardy after all, when there rose a commotion in that direction. The Indians ran rapidly together, and out of the scuffle cracked a number of rifle and revolver shots. Wallace and Vance, with a score of others, seized their rifles and rushed toward the scene; but the Indians, fleeing to their ponies, were mounted and away before anyone could reach them. On the ground where they had been, lay the lifeless body of Anthony Nelson, a brave trooper of Company B; and John Rouse, a comrade of Nelson's was carried away by the Cheyennes, whether dead or alive, no one positively knew. The cavalry immediately

mounted and made a sortie, but to no purpose, for the Indians fled across the hills, never stopping until entirely out of sight.

So, through lack of ordinary caution, another tragedy, this time a double one, had come upon the train. Although it was still early in the afternoon, there was no more thought of resuming the march that day; for the Indians might return at any time, and Colonel Sawyer feared to expose the long column of wagons with its inadequate escort to a flank attack in the rough country. The men were set to digging rifle pits around the corral while the officers gathered for a consultation, which Mr. Smith and Wallace, being the owners of an independent section of the wagon train, were asked to attend. As in a military council of war, the junior officer present was first asked to state his opinion of what should be done under the circumstances; the others following in order up to the senior. In reply to the question of Colonel Sawyer, who presided, the junior, a young lieutenant of the Fifth U. S. Volunteers, after clearing his throat awkwardly (for he was unused to taking part in such important deliberations), said:

"In my opinion we ought to retreat to Fort Laramine and get reënforcements. We don't know where General Connor is or whether we can find him. It's about sixty miles to Powder River, and he certainly is n't nearer than that. Then we don't know how many Indians may attack us at any time. We have n't men enough to march under fire, and we can't make any progress if we have to go into corral every time the Indians appear."

This proved to be the opinion of every army officer present, with the exception of Lieutenant Marshall, who was in favor of making an effort to locate General Connor's column before retiring to Laramie.

"Well, gentlemen," said Colonel Sawyer, rising when his turn came, and looking over the sober-faced group about him with an expression of resolute determination in his eyes, "I am unalterably opposed to retreating to Laramie. I am here to lay out a wagon road from Niobrara to the Bozeman Trail. I have laid out five hundred and fifty miles of it, and am within fifty miles of my destination, so far as actual pioneer work is concerned. I do not want to abandon it now, and I think we can get

through. So far as these gentlemen with freight and emigrant wagons are concerned, whom I agreed to see through to Virginia City, I will let them speak for themselves."

The wagon-master of the Hedges train, who was in supreme charge of it since Nat Hedges' death, declared himself anxious to proceed, since Colonel Sawyer believed they could get through. Then Mr. Smith was called upon.

"For myself, gentlemen," said he, earnestly, "I would almost attempt to go on alone rather than give it up. Practically all my earthly possessions are represented by the contents of my four wagons. I shall be ruined if my plans for reaching Montana are overthrown. I earnestly advocate keeping on."

As his father sat down, Wallace arose, rather apologetically. But there was no uncertainty in his voice as he said: "My opinion may not be worth much, but I agree with my father and believe, as Colonel Sawyer does, that we can push on until we find General Connor. I have fought Indians before, and I don't think those around here can stop us. I am ready, too, to volunteer on any scouting parties

or other work that may be necessary for getting us out of this hole."

Wallace's services, on such hazardous duty, however, were not called for, as it was finally decided by Colonel Sawyer that a party consisting of his chief guide Estes, his interpreter Baptiste Defond, and his two scouts, Charles W. Lears and Lieutenant-Colonel Godfrey, lately of the Second Maine Cavalry, all of whom were eager for the work, should start out the next night after the train had made another day's march toward the Powder River, and try to find General Connor. Poor Nelson's body was buried at dusk in one of the rifle pits. Early next morning, no Indians appearing, the train went into column and marched away, leaving two lonely graves under the trampled sod of the corral, mute witnesses of the countless similar tragedies which have marked every mile of progress in the winning of the West.

CHAPTER V

CORRALLED ON TONGUE RIVER

BEFORE noon, after a march of ten miles, the expedition reached its old camping place of August 9, the point at which it had deflected to the northwest in the false hope of finding a shorter road to Powder River. Within convenient distance of the camp, was an abundance of excellent grass and water, and though wood was scarce, Colonel Sawyer determined to remain here until the scouts could make their reconnoissance and return. Although a party of Indians appeared just before sunset and made a dash at the herd, which was easily repulsed, Estes and his companions rode silently out of the corral about two o'clock next morning, followed by the fervent good-wishes of every soul in the train, and at daylight they were miles on their way. Then followed two days of anxious waiting, while scattered Indians watched the camp with eagle eyes

from the distant ridges, and the stock was herded close to camp under strong guards. Early on the third morning a shout of joy arose as the scouts were seen riding in once more, safe and sound, though men and horses were nearly exhausted from fifty hours' continuous hard riding. They had covered quite one hundred and fifty miles, and found on the Dry Fork of the Powder, about fifty miles distant over a fair lying country, the heavy trail of General Connor's train and large column of troops. The scouts reported the trail as apparently two days old, though they had been unable to overtake Connor and had come back to inform their comrades that the way was open to the Powder River, after reaching which another effort might be made to communicate with the General.

The Indians had disappeared, having seemingly gone northward; and before nine o'clock the train started. Passing between the two southernmost peaks of the majestic group of Pumpkin Buttes, it came safely on the second afternoon following, to the Dry Fork of the Powder. Here, owing to the lateness of the hour, camp was made, though grass

for the stock was very scarce in the vicinity, General Connor having recently camped there with a host of animals, which had nearly cleared the country of forage.

Again, Colonel Godfrey with Baptiste Dufond, a very faithful and courageous French-and-Indian half-breed of the Yankton tribe, sallied out in search of Connor's column. Going down the Powder about thirteen miles, they had the good fortune to come upon Fort Connor, just completed by General Connor's men, who had marched away only the day before toward the Tongue River after Indians, leaving a garrison of three hundred men under command of Colonel James H. Kidd, of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry. As soon as he learned that Colonel Godfrey was from Sawyer's train, Colonel Kidd presented him with orders for Captain Williford from the department commander, instructing him to report with his infantry detachment to Fort Connor for service under General Connor. This left only Lieutenant Wood's detachment of Dakota Cavalry, and the two howitzers, to escort the train to the Bighorn River, distant about one hundred and sixty miles,

where it was believed that danger from Indian attacks would cease. But there was no thought of stopping. Colonel Sawyer brought his wagons down to the fort next day, and late the following afternoon started for a night's forced march of twenty-six miles to Crazy Woman's Fork, a branch of the Powder, which was the next water on the route. The distance was accomplished, traveling being easy on account of the recent passage through the country of General Connor's column, which had made a fairly good road. The cool night marching proved so comfortable for the stock that it was repeated until the train had reached the Big Piney Fork of the Powder, sixty-six miles beyond Fort Connor.

Ever since leaving the fort the train had been passing through a country of the most charming natural beauty, very different from the monotonous and sometimes barren plains it had so often traveled in the previous stages of its journey. The trail skirted the eastern and northeastern bases of the Bighorn Mountains, at distances of from six to twelve miles beyond the outstanding spurs. The

majestic range, towering up on the left, its lower ridges clothed in dark forests of pine-trees and other evergreens, and its summits of brown, wind-swept crags towering towards the zenith, and mantled in the dazzling draperies of the first early autumn snows, presented to the eyes of Wallace Smith such ever changing pictures of loveliness that he could hardly take his eyes from them. The streams which came brawling down from the mountains across the road to feed the Powder, the Tongue, the Bighorn, and other tributaries of the Yellowstone, were filled with water as clear as crystal and cold as ice, fresh from the glaciers and snow fields of the upper ranges. The very air possessed a purity and exhilaration which were born of the high altitudes. Just before reaching the Piney Fork, the train passed Lake DeSmet, a body of water about a mile long and half a mile wide, as beautiful as a loch of the Scottish Highlands, and camp on the Piney was made under the shadows of several high symmetrical ridges rising, verdant with foliage, between the valleys of dancing streams. In the valleys the blue grass grew knee-deep, dense and luxuriant, a very

paradise for the stock; and it was easy to understand why the buffalo and other game crowded into this region in preference to all others.

"Would n't this be a place to settle down and live in?" exclaimed Wallace, standing beside the Smith wagons after corral was formed, and looking over the extent of wild landscape. "It surely would be, if it was n't for Indians and if a person had nothing to think of except having a good time. Hunting, fishing, riding, exploring—was there ever a finer country for such things? It seems to me this is the most beautiful place I ever saw."

His father smiled at his enthusiasm. "Perhaps sometime, Wallace, if you like it so well, we can come back here and go into business. This country will certainly be settled within a few years, and I should not be surprised to see a city spring up here, or near here. It certainly seems in every way to be an ideal location."

"Well, I hope it can be done, father," Wallace replied, "for I don't believe Bozeman can have anything like as attractive surroundings as this."

For Wallace—who little dreamed that night in

the camp of Sawyer's train how familiar he was to become in a time not far distant with this fair, lonely region of forested hills and swift streams along the Piney—the locality never lost its charm, even through the long weeks of toil and peril and anxiety which he was to know there. But his father's optimistic prediction concerning the early settlement of the country seemed visionary indeed, when, two days later, at the crossing of the Tongue River, about thirty-five miles beyond the Piney, a member of the escort, while scouting about a mile in advance, was surrounded and killed by Indians, who suddenly made their appearance on every side. This tragedy was peculiarly distressing because the members of the expedition were beginning to feel that they had passed beyond the danger zone, no enemy having been seen for several days. The victim, Captain Cole, of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry, whose detachment was at Fort Connor, and who with three of his men had stumbled upon Sawyer's train while scouting, was a gallant and very popular young officer, who had already lost an arm in the service of his country on a Southern battle field. His pres-

ence with the Sawyer escort was purely voluntary, as he had not been detailed to accompany it.

The gloom and uneasiness occasioned by Captain Cole's death gave place to genuine alarm on the morning of the next day, September 1, just after the wagons had crossed the North Branch of Tongue River, and come out upon the bottom beyond, which was bounded at its further edge, about half a mile distant, by a line of bluffs quite high and steep. The Indians who had killed Captain Cole had not put in an appearance that morning but every usual precaution had been taken as to advance and rear guards.

The wagons had all passed by a good ford over the hard, gravelly bed of the stream, in which the water was about two feet deep and one hundred feet wide from bank to bank; and the rear guard was just driving the loose cattle into the water, when there arose a tempest of terrific yells out of the woodland a few yards from the left flank. At the same instant a volley of rifle-shots rang out, and a throng of mounted Indians came charging down upon the handful of white men.

"For Heaven's sake, Vance, get your rifle and come!" shouted Wallace, who was riding beside their wagons, as he heard the unmistakable uproar. "The rear guard 's attacked and they 're only about a dozen. The redskins 'll get all the loose stock."

In a moment the two boys, Vance riding Mr. Smith's horse, were galloping toward the rear with a half dozen other civilians, members of the train; for the cavalry advance-guard was half a mile ahead, and would not have dared to go to the relief of the rear in any case, leaving the front of the train unprotected.

As the little reënforcement splashed through the river the men saw the rear-guard, driven to one side of the trail by the force of the enemy's charge, shooting into the Indians and at the same time striving to drive toward the ford as many as possible of the panic-stricken cattle, which were careering wildly all over the river bottom, pursued by the Indians, yelling and waving buffalo robes and bright colored blankets to frighten the animals into the woods from which the charge had come.

"Let 's get to the rear-guard," said one of the re-

lief party, starting toward the left as they came out on the bank.

"No, come this way!" Vance shouted at the speaker, as he and Wallace headed off to the right. "We can drive some of the cattle to'd the riveh if we go oveh heah."

Catching his meaning, the others followed and by the maneuver, circling around toward the Indians without approaching them too closely, they succeeded in heading back into the river a number of cattle which otherwise would have been lost. The rear-guard, meantime, advanced toward them, and in a moment the two parties united, several rods back on the trail. Then, turning in their saddles, and shooting backward at the Indians, they retreated to the ford and across it, running before them the remaining animals of the herd. On the farther bank they encountered Colonel Sawyer, just arrived there from the head of the train.

"How many cattle did they get?" was his first question, directed to Sergeant Dimmick, who was in command of the rear-guard.

"Over thorty, sor," replied the Irish soldier.

"Divil a thing could we do wid the shtock, the Injuns come thot quick. Sure, it was all over before it begun."

The Colonel's face showed his dismay. "That 's bad, mighty bad," he exclaimed. "How many Indians were there?"

" Howly Mother! Oi don't know, sor," answered the sergeant. "They 're thicker thin bristles on a Tipperary pig. Yez can see fer yirself, sor."

The Colonel looked across the stream to where scores of Indians were galloping about over the bottom.

"Well, it can't be helped now," he said, bitterly. "We have n't enough men to go after them. Close up on the wagons, sergeant, and we 'll try to go on a while yet if Indians don't show ahead of us."

He turned and galloped toward the front, followed by Wallace and Vance and the other civilians. But they had not yet reached the center of the train, when Wallace, who was close to the commander, suddenly exclaimed, pointing to the bluffs on the left:

"Look there, Colonel! Those fellows are going to charge!"

The bluffs had, indeed, become alive with Indians, who were massing, evidently to ride down on the flank of the train.

"We 'll have to corral at once," exclaimed the Colonel. "Carry the order back along the line, Smith. I 'll go to the front."

He dashed away in one direction and Wallace in the other, and soon the leading wagons swung away from the river and circled back toward the center, each team being driven in on the left of the wagon ahead of it to form the circular corral. When the wagons began to turn, the advance-guard of Dakota cavalry was up nearly at the base of the bluffs, the men lying dismounted in the grass, firing at the heads of the Indians as they appeared over the crest. Their horses, turned loose by the troopers, galloped back to the corral, which, forming in the middle of the bottom, left the soldiers some distance away, while the Indians were able to rush down and attack the wagons, firing and yelling.

The utmost confusion seized the train, for many teamsters halted their wagons and caught up their

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guns in obedience to the instinct of self-preservation, interrupting the formation of the corral. Then the advance-guard, completely out of breath, came running in on foot, Will van Osdel among them. Wallace, returning from the rear after delivering his order along the line, pulled up beside his father and said,

"Are you getting along all right? or shall I stay and help you?"

"No, no," Mr. Smith answered, vehemently, fully realizing that the situation was becoming desperate. "Dowd's got whisky, someway, and it 's nerved him up, so he 's sticking to his team. You and Vance both go and help get this corral formed quick, or we 're lost. You 're soldiers; you must help these panic-stricken fellows."

Vance had been with him, but he now mounted again and galloped off with Wallace to a point where several frightened teams of oxen had turned out of the road, twisting their wagons across it. Just beyond, in the brush on the river bank, a lone Indian had hidden himself and was shooting at the team-

sters; others farther along the bank had been driven out by the shell fire from the howitzers. The boys rode up and Wallace shouted to the drivers,

"Get your teams straightened out and go ahead into corral. We 'll stand off the Indians."

Throwing themselves flat on the ground in front of the wagons, the boys opened fire, devoting their attention especially to the Indian in the brush, but he was well concealed and they could not silence him. Presently Vance sprang up and ran to help a driver named James Dillelend, who was having trouble with his frantic animals. Just as he came up, Dillelend made a peculiar leap forward, then his knees crumpled under him and he sank to the ground, exclaiming,

"Oh, my God, I 'm shot!"

Vance had no time to help the man, but catching up the latter's ox-goad, after a short but vigorous tussle with the six steers, succeeded in straightening them out in the road again and drove ahead, while others picked up Dillelend, who was evidently seriously wounded, and placed him in the wagon. Wallace, after seeing the other teams righted, rode off

to find Doctor Tingley, the physician of the expedition, and send him to the injured man.

In spite of the vigor of the enemy's opposition, the corral was finally formed at a point about equidistant between the bluffs and the river so as to be exposed as little as possible to the enemy's fire from either direction. The cavalry soon cleared the bottom and drove the Indians to the top of the bluffs; but firing continued from both sides all day long, and when night came it was a weary crowd of white men who were huddled within the circle of wagons.

"It will mean slow traveling from now on," said Mr. Smith, rather gloomily, as they sat in the darkness beside their wagons, all fires having been put out at twilight so as not to attract the attention of the enemy. "Two thirds of the spare stock is gone, and there 'll be no relieving broken-down teams."

"I 've an idea, father, that all the teams will have time for a good rest right here in this camp," answered Wallace.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I think we 're in a trap," Wallace returned, "and the Indians won't let us out of it

until we get reënforcements. How can we move again as long as they hold that bluff?"

"Why could n't the cavalry drive them from theah?" asked Vance.

"They 'd have to leave the train uncovered while they did it, Vance, and even then the boys might ride straight into an ambush, they are so few. You 've no idea how clever these plains Indians are at fixing up ambushes."

"If we 're kept here many days the stock 'll starve to death," put in Jack Dowd. "There ain't feed enough around to last no time at all. Lord, if I ever get out o' this country alive, you bet I 'll never come in it again."

Dowd's dejected remark brought forth no comment, for he had talked in this way often before; but Wallace's prediction about the intentions of the Indians found confirmation when the next morning's light showed the bluffs and the opposite river bank still occupied by the enemy in numbers plainly aggregating three hundred or more. The air was perfectly still at that early hour, and the slightest sound could be heard for a long distance. Just before sun-

rise, while all hands were busy about breakfast, they were startled by a shout coming from the dense brush down the river,

"Hoy! Hoy!"

CHAPTER VI

THE ESCAPE OF THE HOSTAGES

WALLACE raised a flushed face above the pan of bacon he was frying, and asked, "What 's that?"

Again the shout arose, a little nearer.

"Hoy! Hoy!"

"It must be an Injun," said Vance. "None of ouh fellows ahe projectin' around way out theah."

"The Colonel 's going out to meet them," Mr. Smith remarked, observing Colonel Sawyer and several others moving slowly from the corral in the direction of the bushes. "Walk over, Wallace, and see what 's up."

Wallace, quite willing to satisfy his own curiosity, hastened over and joined the group behind the Colonel, who was accompanied by Estes and Defond. Once more the shout arose from the bushes and this time Estes answered,

"Hoy! What do you want?"

"Me want talk," came the answer, in broken English, whereat the Colonel and his followers looked at one another in surprise. "We want peace. You no shoot, then we come in, talk."

"Come on," shouted Estes. "We won't shoot."

A moment later the form of an Indian, an immense fellow over six feet tall and finely proportioned, emerged from the thicket and came on across the open ground. He was fully armed, his face was smeared with yellow and vermilion war paint, but when he reached the white men he halted and solemnly shook hands all around. Then he said:

"Me talk straight. We want peace. Me come 'head, find if safe. You no shoot, more come in. Have heap big talk, make peace."

"We want peace, too," said Colonel Sawyer. "If more chiefs want to come and talk, go and get them. We will wait right here and talk to them when they come."

The Indian grunted his approval and, turning, disappeared the way he had come. After a time he returned, bringing with him several other Indians,

daubed like himself with paint and decked in barbaric finery. Their intentions were evidently peaceable. They squatted down on the ground with the white men, forming a circle. Then one of the visitors produced and lighted a pipe and after it had passed around once, each man taking a whiff, he arose and walked around the circle, solemnly shaking hands with every one, white and Indian. Then returning to his place and standing there, he began to speak. Baptiste Defond looked at Colonel Sawyer and shook his head.

"I no understan'," said he. "He no talk Sioux. 'Rapahoe, mebbe."

The Indian who had first come in nodded his head in assent.

"Ugh!" said he. "We 'Rapahoe."

"Can you get it, Ben?" the Colonel asked of Estes.

"No, I don't know the lingo," the guide answered, grinning. "But it 's 'Rapahoe, all right."

"Me tell you what he say," said the first Indian, so his broken English had to suffice by way of translation.

The chief was speaking at some length, but finally

he stopped and looked at his companion, who turned to Colonel Sawyer and said, in words much less clear than here given,

"He says, 'we are Arapahoes. We have been fighting you but now we want peace. You are too strong for us. We thought we had you in a corner but your medicine is strong. We have been fighting you because we wanted to get even for what the big chief with the many soldiers, who is ahead of you, did to us four suns ago."

"Conner, he means, by crackey!" whispered Will van Osdel, who was standing beside Wallace just back of the council circle. "I hope he cleaned out half of 'em."

Colonel Sawyer said to the interpreter, sternly: "Tell him, 'You may as well stop fighting, for we shall always be too strong for you. You have killed one of our men and another is dying, and we are very angry.' "

While this was being translated Wallace whispered to Van Osdel,

"Is Dillelend dead?"

The other shook his head. "No," he replied.

"Merrell, one of the emigrants. But Dillelend won't last long, Doctor Tingley says."

The Indian orator received Colonel Sawyer's reply stolidly and made answer: "We want no more fighting. We want you to help us. We had a hard fight with the soldiers of the big chief four suns ago at the place where the Wolf Creek runs into the Tongue River. They burned our camp and killed many of our warriors and some of our squaws and papooses, and drove away eleven hundred of our ponies. It has left us very poor. We want our ponies back, for the time of cold is coming soon. We want peace and to have some of your men go with some of ours to the big chief and ask him to give our ponies back. If you will do this, we will stop fighting and you can turn your horses and cattle out to graze. Also, some of us will stay with you as prisoners while your men are gone, to prove that no harm will come to them."

Upon receiving this proposal, Colonel Sawyer sent for the escort commander, Lieutenant Wood, and consulted with him and also with his guide and interpreter. After a considerable interval, during

which the other men of the train speculated excitedly as to whether the verdict was to be for peace or war, he replied to the Indian envoys: "I accept your proposal of peace. You know where General Connor, our big chief, and his army are. You send three of your warriors to him and three of my men will go with them and ask him to give you back your ponies, provided you will let my train go ahead in peace. You must bring six of your chiefs here and leave them with me to prove that my messengers will not be harmed and that you will keep your young men from fighting. If any harm is done to my messengers, we will do the same to your chiefs. That is straight talk. Is it good?".

The Indians signified that it was, and at once returned to their own lines, while the news quickly spread through the corral that peace had been made, arousing a feeling of great relief and satisfaction. On the face of it, it seemed a perilous proceeding for three white men to intrust themselves to the mercy of the Indians in the search for General Connor, but among the many hardy and fearless frontiersmen in Colonel Sawyer's following it was easy

to find volunteers who were confident of personal safety so long as Indian hostages would be in the power of their comrades. The three men of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry, who had come in with Captain Cole, being anxious to join Connor, Colonel Sawyer selected them for messengers and privately instructed them to tell the General that, whatever his decision might be regarding the Indian ponies, it was absolutely necessary that he send reënforcements to the train at once.

The Indian hostages and messengers soon came down from the bluffs, and the former were conducted to a point just outside the corral, where a tent was set up for them and where they could be guarded, while the messengers, as soon as they were joined by the three white men who were to accompany them, set off down the river. Strangely enough, the hostages were permitted to retain their weapons, consisting of guns, revolvers, and knives. The main body of Indians on the bluffs retired some distance, and the live-stock of the train was turned out to graze and to drink at the river, under suitable guards.

Now followed a period of waiting which seemed like to prove very irksome, for it was probable that a number of days must elapse before word could be expected from General Connor. The Indians on the bluffs did not come to the camp but they remained near and sometimes individuals of them would approach close enough to converse with the hostages, shouting back and forth in their unknown, guttural Arapahoe; a proceeding which was very exasperating to the mystified white men. Toward evening, however, of the second day after the departure of the messengers, a surprising thing happened. Three warriors on horseback appeared in the distance and rode together to the corral, where a sentry halted them and then sent for Colonel Sawyer, who came out and at once saw that the Indians were the ones who had accompanied his men on the search for General Connor. The Colonel conducted them to the tent of the hostages, followed by a crowd of teamsters and soldiers, who, suspicious that foul play had been done to the Michigan cavalrymen, surrounded the messengers and handled their rifles threateningly.

"Where are my men?" demanded the Colonel, through the Arapahoe interpreter.

"They are safe," replied one of the messengers. "They have gone to your big chief. But while we were yet with them we met a big party of white soldiers coming to you and we feared to go on."

Colonel Sawyer turned to the crowd of his followers.

"White soldiers coming to us?" said he. "That 's strange, when the General does n't even know yet that we need help. Either these fellows are lying outright or else they may have met a detachment coming down to Fort Connor. In the latter case, we 'll probably see them, for they 'll have to pass here."

While he was speaking the Arapahoe messengers, unopposed, had started toward the river.

"Here, come back!" called the Colonel, as soon as he noticed them.

But the Indians merely turned their heads and answered as they kept on, "Our horses are very thirsty. We want to water them."

A dozen white men raised their rifles, but the Colo-

nel cried, peremptorily, "Don't shoot, men! We can't afford to begin fighting again. We 've still got these chiefs in our hands. I 'll talk to them about this."

While the messengers, unchallenged, pursued their way to the river and across it, the Colonel, alone, stepped hastily into the tent of the hostages and dropped the fly behind him. Wallace, who was standing not far away with Will van Osdel, looked after him in surprise and perplexity.

"I don't like this business," he said, uneasily. "What did the Colonel let those messengers get away for? He should n't have allowed them to go so far that they could n't be stopped except by shooting. And now he 's gone alone in there with those six hostiles. He 'll have himself and us in trouble again, first he knows."

"It 's an insane thing to do," Van Osdel agreed, impatiently. "Those fellows are all armed."

Five minutes passed, then ten, but Colonel Sawyer did not leave the tent. Indians in greater numbers than had appeared in the two days past began showing themselves on the bluff. The white men,

on their part, were watching the tent of the hostages with vague misgivings that some mysterious transaction was going forward beneath it. The commander of the escort was not near, no one having notified him that anything out of the usual order had occurred.

At length Will van Osdel, who had been standing with Wallace, Mr. Smith and Vance, turned abruptly and walked with a determined step to the tent, where he raised the fly. There he stood motionless for a moment, looking in, then quickly stepped back and returned to the wagons. A dozen men immediately surrounded him and Mr. Smith and those with him joined them.

"It 's a confounded fine fix!" Will was exclaiming as they came up. "Every Injin in there has the Colonel covered with a gun or revolver and he don't dare move."

"What did we let 'em keep their weepons fer?" shouted someone, excitedly, accompanying the question with an oath.

"Shut up, you fool," Estes, the guide, admonished him, roughly. "Don't holler like that in front of

them redskins over there. How in thunder do you suppose Will knows why they 've got 'em?"

"Why, they 'll kill the Colonel," exclaimed the man who had shouted, but in more guarded tones. "We must rush the tent."

"Rush the tent!" sneered Estes. "An' let 'em kill the Colonel an' some of us, too, eh?"

"It 's the Colonel's fault," exclaimed someone else, wrathfully, in a loud tone. "Let 's get the howitzers an' blow the whole kit an' boodle off the map!"

The fly of the tent was quickly raised and the Colonel's face appeared in the opening.

"For God's sake, don't do that, men!" he called. "These fellows are afraid you mean to kill them and that 's why they 're holding me here. Keep cool and I can get things fixed up with them soon."

"Well, maybe he can," said Van Osdel, with much impatience, "but I think something 's got to be done and that quick. We 're getting demoralized and, first we know, those redskins on the hill will jump us. I 'm going around the corral and see whether Lieutenant Wood is over there with the howitzers."

He started away but stopped again as an Indian armed with a rifle was seen approaching the tent from the bluffs. He was evidently a mere boy, not yet fully grown, but very energetic and confident in his movements and he came up to the tent without hesitation and exchanged several sentences in Arapahoe with the chiefs inside. While he was still talking, Will started away again and a moment later Wallace followed him. Coming around on the far side of the corral, Wallace stopped a moment to speak to a teamster and then, going on, was startled to see, approaching from the other direction and already within a few feet of Van Osdel, the little Indian who had come to the tent. He was evidently making a deliberate inspection of the corral and its defenders. As he and Van Osdel came within a few feet of each other, the Indian lad suddenly raised his rifle and covered the soldier, motioning with his head for the latter to pass him next to the wagons. There was nothing for Van Osdel to do but obey, and he did so. Wallace, though not much given to caution, felt a strange misgiving as he looked at the calm, dauntless face of the Indian boy and, to avoid

the latter, he hastily stepped between two wagons into the corral, where a second later he encountered Van Osdel.

"Whew!" exclaimed the latter, who was rather pale while in his eyes was a peculiar expression of awe. "Did you see that, Wallace? I thought I was a goner, sure! That little redskin 's got nerve to come in and stand up white men right in our camp. He 's got something more than nerve; I don't know what. I just felt paralyzed in front of him."

The two, feeling decidedly uncomfortable, hurriedly crossed the corral and passed out again in front of the howitzers, around which a number of men were gathered. There stood the little Indian, coolly looking over the guns. Van Osdel ran up, exclaiming that the unwelcome visitor had been on the point of shooting him a moment before, whereupon one of the teamsters raised his long Springfield rifle and presented its muzzle within a couple of feet of the Indian lad's head. The latter, without a tremor, turned and looked down the threatening barrel into the eyes of the man who held it, as calmly as if he were looking into the eyes of a friend.

"Don't shoot him!" cried Van Osdel, in a sudden paroxysm of alarm. "He did n't hurt me, and he 's clear grit, if he is an Injin."

The teamster's eyes wavered under the steady gaze of his opponent and his crooked finger did not press the trigger. After eyeing him for a number of seconds, the Indian boy turned contemptuously away and walked on around the corral to the tent, from which, after talking again to the hostages and seemingly giving them a report of his observations, he deliberately took his departure to the bluffs.

No one in the camp knew at the time who this young visitor was, nor would his name have meant anything to them had they heard it. But years later Will van Osdel learned that the intrepid boy warrior, whose absolute fearlessness seemed to exercise an almost hypnotic influence over the white men surrounding him, was none other than Crazy Horse, in after years the most daring and able general of the great Sioux Nation, who did more, probably, than any other Indian leader to delay the final conquest of the Sioux territories by the white men.

When Will and Wallace left the vicinity of the

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Without a tremor looked down the threatening barrel

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hostages' tent and started around the corral, Vance stepped up to Estes and said, in a low tone, "Mr. Estes, if a dozen aw so of us should kind of sa'nteh up to that tent and coveh the whole redskin outfit at once, is n't that goin' to discou'age 'em f'om shootin' the Cunnel?"

"Yes, I guess it would," admitted the guide, who was plainly much perplexed by the situation, "if a dozen of us could do it all at once. But who 'll go?" He turned to the crowd around. "Will you?" he asked the first one on whom his eye fell.

"It won't do no good," said the teamster. "They 'll shoot, anyhow, an' then we 'll have a fight."

"How about you?" demanded Estes of the next.

"Aw, we can't stand any more fightin'. I ain't for it," was the answer.

"And you?"

This was one of the pioneers. "Yes, I 'll go if you can get enough others," he returned.

"And you?"

"We 'd better not monkey with 'em," said this one, emphatically, shaking his head. "Let 's wait an' see if they won't let the Colonel go."

"You see," said Estes, turning to Vance with a discouraged glance.

"I see we 've got most enough," Vance returned, doggedly. "Heah 's you and I and Mr. Smith and this otheh chap, and Will and Wallace 'll go when they get back. We can suah get enough mo' an' it 's a Yankee trick—I mean, a low-down trick—to leave the Cunnel a-wigglin' his toes in theah, jes' plumb helpless."

But no one moved, and they waited again till presently the little Indian returned, talked to the hostages and left for the bluffs. Then Van Osdel and Wallace came back; and just after they arrived, Vance exclaimed: "Look!"

Everyone turned and saw the rear of the tent open suddenly and the Indian chiefs walk out and hurry away toward the bluffs. Two of them were behind the rest, compelling Colonel Sawyer to walk between them, and he was thus held directly in the line of fire if his men should open on the fugitives. Instantly the Indians on the bluffs began yelling and brandishing their weapons, and Wallace cried to the men

around: "Come, let 's take after them! Why, boys, they 'll get clear away with the Colonel!"

But again no one moved. The men were, in fact, glad to see the troublesome hostages leave and did not seem to care whether they took the Colonel with them or not. However, when more than half way to the bluffs, the Indians released their prisoner and, hastening on, disappeared up the hill, while the Colonel, with hanging head, turned about and slowly walked back to camp.

He was received in dead silence, for a feeling of great despondency had come over the men. They were disgusted with their commander for allowing himself to fall into such an extremely awkward predicament, and with both him and themselves for the escape of the prisoners and the general confusion and helplessness which had seized the camp. There was no disguising the fact that the unfortunate incident which had just occurred had been caused by lack of prudence and relaxation of discipline; and the men, who, of course, were largely to blame, lost confidence in themselves and in their leaders when

they realized how easily they had been outwitted by the Indians.

Around the camp fires that evening the opinion was freely expressed that the expedition was a failure and could go no further but would have to retreat to Fort Connor. This opinion gained new supporters next morning when a detachment of twenty-seven men of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry, under Captain Kellogg, rode into camp, worn out with marching and fighting, and, in fact, not a little frightened by the experiences they had been through. They reported that they had taken a mail from the fort to General Connor's command, but on the journey back had been attacked by Indians in heavy force and compelled to fight for their lives. On the previous morning they had met the messengers sent out by Colonel Sawyer and had directed the three white men how to get to General Connor, who had gone far down Tongue River; but the three Indians, on meeting them, had abandoned the search and disappeared. It was doubtless this detachment whose coming they had reported to Colonel Sawyer. Captain Kellogg did not dare attempt to go on to Fort

Connor with his small party after the evidence he had seen of the numbers and fighting qualities of the enemy, so he made camp beside Sawyer's corral to await, like the rest, the hoped-for reënforcements from General Connor.

In this uncomfortable and trying situation a full week passed, during several days of which a severe rain storm prevailed, causing the mud to become so deep in the corral that the latter finally had to be moved. The main body of the Indians seemed to have gone away, but there were always some scouts on watch along the bluffs. At the end of the week, no word having come from General Connor, the discontent and alarm of the men became so great that they demanded of Colonel Sawyer that he abandon the expedition and retreat to Fort Connor. In vain he protested and argued; in the whole camp were only about twenty men, including the Smiths, who were willing to make any further effort to go forward without reënforcements. So the following morning, with heavy heart, the Colonel ordered the train into column and began the retreat. To no one in the expedition was the movement a more bitter

tragedy than to Mr. Smith and Wallace, for to them it meant the destruction of all their hopes and a great pecuniary loss; and every backward step over the familiar trail they had traversed nearly two weeks before was taken with lagging feet and gloomy thoughts.

CHAPTER VII

AN OLD FRIEND AND A YOUNG FOOL

JUST before camp was to be made for the night at the close of the first day of the retreat, a scout from the rear came galloping up and reported cavalry coming behind them. A moment later the men were greeting with a tempest of cheers the long-delayed reënforcement from General Connor; Company I, of the Second California Cavalry and a company of friendly Indian scouts, all commanded by Captain A. E. Brown, of the Second California. Captain Brown was under orders to escort the train as far as the Bighorn with his own command and the Dakota Cavalry, so next morning, rejoicing in the vigor of restored confidence and energy, Colonel Sawyer and his men, so often and so grievously delayed, resumed their march toward Montana.

The providential arrival of the Californians, bold, well-disciplined riders filled with the cheerful self-

confidence to be expected of men fresh from the work of building an empire on the Pacific slope, seemed to bring to the Sawyer train a change of fortune, as it also brought to the Dakota Cavalry relief from the desperate strain of trying to protect an expedition ten times as large as their small numbers should have been expected to guard. The train progressed by easy, rapid marches to the Bighorn, encountering no more hostile Indians or delays of the road. At this river the emigrants and road-builders parted from their escort, but the luck the Californians had brought continued with them. One evening just two weeks later, after crossing Pryor's Fork, Clark's Fork, and a number of other tributaries of the Yellowstone, and finally fording the latter stream itself, camp was made in a beautiful natural park on the west side of the divide between the Gallatin and the Yellowstone Rivers.

Standing beside their wagons in the early dusk of that October evening, Mr. Smith and Wallace looked out over the wide, darkening valley of the Gallatin spread below them, and knew that somewhere not far distant in its expanses of forest and open

meadow, lay the hamlet toward which their thoughts and efforts had been directed for so many anxious months—Bozeman City.

"Well, Wallace, how do you like the look of the country, now that we have finally reached it?" asked Mr. Smith, turning a curious glance upon his son.

"At any rate, it 's pretty to look at," Wallace replied, carefully. "It seems like a good farming country—see how smooth the valley is. The soil looks rich, too, and there 's plenty of good timber for building, I should think. I don't see any houses or farms, though. Do you?"

"They are probably close to the town and river," Mr. Smith surmised; "too far from here for us to see at this time of day. Anyway, they must be there, for Tom Mahan said they were. We 'll see old Tom pretty soon now," he chuckled with boyish anticipation, "and if he can't show down with those farms and placer mines he wrote me such rosy yarns about, I 'll take satisfaction out of his anatomy."

Late the following morning the train rolled down the single, rutted street of Bozeman City, whose few scattered log cabins and one-story business build-

ings of undressed and unpainted boards seemed positively palatial to the eyes of the travelers, who had not viewed a structure built by white men, save Fort Connor, in nearly four months. The population turned out *en masse* to welcome and inspect the train. Among the crowd were two or three women, though most of those who gathered around were men, hardy looking individuals, generally, wearing long beards and dressed in rough working clothes with trousers tucked into the tops of high leather boots. But presently a tall, powerfully-built man whose well-trimmed mustache, cloth cap, and white flannel shirt lent him an air of professional distinction as marked as a silk hat and a Prince Albert coat would have done in a more highly civilized community, hurried through the crowd and grasped Mr. Smith by one hand and shoulder as roughly as if he were the sheriff seizing a prisoner.

"Sam, you disreputable tramp!" he shouted, delightedly. "You look like a last year's scarecrow. Why don't you open some of your crates and put on a suit of store clothes before you come into a metropolis like this? Welcome to Bozeman City!"

He swept his arm in a comprehensive gesture over the hamlet and the grinning onlookers and then added, addressing the latter, "Bozeman City, welcome Mr. Samuel Smith, once of Minnesota, who has come into our midst to open the most palatial commercial emporium in Montana Territory, the promised land of the West."

"Tom, you unmerciful old saw bones!" cried Mr. Smith, as soon as he found an opening for speech, "leggo my shoulder! I don't want any amputation now. And as soon as you get through orating, kindly tell me where that town is you wrote me about; that sumptuous city, set in an enchanting vale and eternally overarched by the rainbow of promise?"

"Here, here!" exclaimed Dr. Mahan, again waving his arm over the surrounding landscape. "Don't you see the rainbow? Get out your fairy spectacles! Don't you know that a man who chases rainbows as you do never can see without 'em? And, by the way, when you build your general merchandise palace on the city lot which I have reserved for you at a fabulous price, if you don't put a private office in the rear end of it for Thomas A. Mahan,

Physician and Surgeon, I 'll sick the Vigilance Committee onto you!''

Wallace stood by, watching in sheer amazement the antics of his usually sedate father and this gentleman of dignified appearance, until he realized, as he very quickly did, that under the mask of nonsense these boyhood chums and lifelong friends were concealing the real depths of their joy over this reunion, which each believed was to result in a permanent association for the future. Their exuberant mood soon settled to one of more quiet satisfaction, and by the time the Smith wagons had been cut out of the train and run up at the side of the street, and farewells had been said to Colonel Sawyer and the other associates of the long journey (who, by the way, safely reached their destination at Virginia City seven days later), Mr. Smith and Wallace were quite ready to go with Dr. Mahan to view the location he recommended for the future store and to talk seriously over plans. The latter were quite simple. The main questions were, how large the building should be made, and how many men should be employed to start out next morning into the good pine

timber not far from town to cut logs for the structure.

These points settled, the Smiths went back to their wagons, where Vance Lytle and Jack Dowd were waiting to be paid off. From a pocket book which he had stocked well with bills for this and other purposes before he left Yankton, Mr. Smith counted into the hand of each of his employés the money which was due him. In his heart there could not but be a vast difference between the regard which Mr. Smith felt for Vance, cheerful, efficient, and courageous, and the feeling he entertained toward moody, unreliable, timid Jack Dowd. But he was careful to speak impartially when, after paying them, he said:

"You boys have come a long journey with Wallace and me, and we 've passed through some dangerous times together. Now we have reached the land of gold, and of course you are free to go where you will. But you know Wallace and I intend entering business here in Bozeman and shall need some help; perhaps not two men right along, or, on the other hand, perhaps more,—it will depend on how trade develops. But, if you would like to stay with us, I

will give you both employment for at least a month. That will give you time to get acquainted with the people and the country; and then, if you want to change, or we find we don't need you both, you can doubtless easily get other employment. What do you say?"

Vance spoke up promptly. "I 'm mighty much obliged to you, Mr. Smith, fo' the chance. Fo' one, I 'll stay with you. It 's a heap bettah than projectin' off afteh gold, most especially now, right on the aidge of winteh. We suah have seen some ticklish times togetheh and now I 'd like to shaeh in with you-all on some that ain't so ticklish." He looked at Wallace with a smile which was a bit wistful, despite the quizzical curve of his lips. "You want me to stay, Yank?" he asked.

"You bet I do, you old Johnnie Reb," answered Wallace, heartily.

Mr. Smith turned to Dowd and tried to speak cordially.

"Well, Jack, what do you say?"

Dowd had gained wonderfully in self-confidence since arriving once more in a country of white men.

The cringing, hunted look had gone out of his face. He wore his hat considerably tilted over one eye and walked with a perceptible swagger. A rumor had come to Wallace that Dowd had already bragged in a saloon of having killed two Indians with his own hands in a fracas with the Cheyennes beyond Pumpkin Buttes. During Mr. Smith's conversation with Vance, Dowd had stood jingling some coins in his pocket and airily contemplating the landscape behind Bozeman City. Now, as he replied to Mr. Smith's question, he turned upon that gentleman a shifty, suspicious glance, not unmixed with defiance.

"No," he replied, in an unnecessarily loud tone, extracting a cheap cigar from his pocket and tilting it in the corner of his mouth. "No, I guess I 've trotted with you fellers about as long as I wanta. I 'm gonta stay here a few days an' git acquainted, all right, but then I 'm gonta hit the trail fer the rich diggin's soon as I find my bearin's. No use comin' to a country where gold 's layin' around loose an' then slavin' in a little-of-everything store." He gave Vance a contemptuous glance. "It 's my nater to play fer big stakes, where a man with push has got

a chanct to make his pile quick an' easy." His chest swelled visibly as he lit his cigar.

"Very well, Dowd; suit yourself," said Mr. Smith, coldly, and turned away.

"Blamed fool," drawled Vance as they watched Dowd saunter off down the street. "I wondeh if he reckons to scrape gold off the snow banks in this heah country? He 'll be comin' around to the back do' of ouh 'little-of-everything stohe' in a few weeks, just a-honin' fo' a hand-out."

Four days later Dowd disappeared from Bozeman City in company with three or four other men who had become his most intimate friends in the genial atmosphere of the "Mountain Dew Saloon." Before leaving, Dowd had parted with all of his wages to the proprietor of the establishment mentioned, in exchange for a limited number of glasses, at forty cents per glass, of a fiery red liquid which had never seen the green hills of Kentucky. Curiously enough, on the very night that the congenial party left Bozeman, Mr. Smith's riding-horse disappeared from its picket rope behind the tent in which the Smiths were temporarily living, and was seen no more.

Three months passed. The deep snows of mid-January covered the hills and valleys of southwestern Montana and drifted around the log cabins of Bozeman City. But within those cabins was plenty of warmth and rude comfort and good cheer; not least, by any means, in the comparatively large building occupied by the living-room and the general merchandise store of Samuel Smith & Son, to which was appended a commodious lean-to where Thomas Mahan, M.D., dispensed healing advice and pills at the rate of four pennyweights of gold dust per consultation. Bozeman was an extraordinarily healthy community, the Doctor cheerfully explained, so he had to charge high to make a living. With the Smiths, business was brisk, for the farmers of the Gallatin Valley, who had but to tickle the virgin soil to make it laugh, had enjoyed bounteous harvests, and were inclined to get as many of the comforts of life as lay within their reach to lighten their isolation. Moreover, Dr. Mahan had not exaggerated the richness of the placer mines in the vicinity, and the gold dust and nuggets of fortunate miners came into the stores of Bozeman in generous quantity.

Vance was spending his evenings zealously studying law books from the library, and under the instruction of a young man in town who was running a blacksmith shop while he awaited the establishment of Montana courts that he might become a pioneer barrister. Both Mr. Smith and Wallace had received and replied to letters from the dear ones in far-away St. Paul, bringing assurances of good health and telling of the quiet life of the temporary home there and the work and ambitions of school. These letters were none the less welcome because they were dated many months back and had come to Bozeman by a long, long journey; over the Pacific Railroad to its temporary terminus at Fremont, Nebraska, thence west over the Great Overland Trail to Salt Lake City, north across Eastern Idaho to Bannack City, Montana, and then around over a circuitous route through Silver Bow and Virginia City to their destination. Such was the roundabout mail route, and, indeed, the passenger and freight route, also, from the east to Montana, which the road surveyed by Colonel Sawyer and the one leading south from Fort Connor to Fort Laramie was

designed to shorten by hundreds of miles. The traveler on the long road was beset every moment from the time he left Eastern Nebraska till he stepped from the stagecoach or dismounted from his horse at his objective point in Montana, by the dangers of hostile Indians, highwaymen, and the perils of storm and flood. No wonder the people of Montana of that day were ready to make almost any sacrifices and to fight any number of savages to secure a safer and shorter thoroughfare. Rumor, drifting down to Bozeman from Helena, the Territorial capital, already had it that the Federal Government was making great plans for opening up the Bozeman Road finally and permanently the following summer, negotiating a treaty of peace with all the Indians of the country by which they would guarantee no more to interfere with travel on the road, and establishing a series of forts along the latter to enforce the treaty.

The Smiths listened to these rumors with fervent hopes that they might prove true, for they were beginning to look forward anxiously to the next spring, when the family and a new stock of goods must both

be brought out to Bozeman. As yet, however, there were rumors only, and about this time an event occurred which drove less pressing matters from their minds for the time being.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAIL OF THE FIVE SHOD HORSES

ONE dazzling bright morning in January, when the little thermometer hanging outside the front door indicated twenty-one degrees below zero, a man in a huge wolfskin overcoat came striding into the store, stamping the snow from his fur boots. When he had removed the ponderous beaver cap from his head and revealed his features, Mr. Smith exclaimed: "Good morning, Mr. Thurlow. Was it bracing enough for you over on Middle Creek this morning?"

Thurlow, taking no heed of his pleasantry, regarded him with a stern, abstracted gaze for a moment as he warmed his hands over the red-hot sheet-iron stove. Then he said, heavily, as if the weight of his thoughts oppressed him: "Smith, there 's work for the Vigilance Committee this morning. Two miles out of town, alongside a thicket, I

came across Chris Olson, lying in the road, frozen solid, with a bullet hole in the back of his head."

Mr. Smith's eyes opened wide with horror, while Wallace and Vance, who were sorting and packing a lot of deer skins that had come in the previous day in trade, stopped their work, aghast.

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "Chris Olson, the miner?"

"The same. You know, or perhaps you don't, that last fall he struck a nice pocket on his prospect, and he 's cradled out close to nine thousand dollars. Last week he stopped by my place and told me it was about run out and he was going to bring his clean-up into town soon for safe keeping. I have n't a doubt that 's what he was doing last night when a gang of road agents caught on someway and dropped him."

"Perhaps they were Indians," suggested Mr. Smith.

"They were not Indians," Mr. Thurlow replied, positively. "Nobody had broke trail this morning this side of where I found Olson, but there are plenty of tracks west from there. The trail they left leads off toward the West Gallatin and it 's the trail of

five shod horses. One of them is Olson's horse, of course, so there are four men in the gang. We must get after them at once. They can't be over fifteen miles from here now."

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Smith.

"Because their tracks are not drifted. It 's about nine o'clock now," Mr. Thurlow glanced at the store clock, "and I got up at four this morning to come to town. The wind was blowing then but quit soon after. If they 'd shot Olson and started away from him before four o'clock the wind would have drifted their tracks. So he can't have been dead over five hours; and as they can't break trail across country over three miles an hour in this snow, three times five makes fifteen."

"You 're right," agreed Mr. Smith. "But what now?"

"Send out your boys after the following men." He named over about a dozen of the most substantial and law-abiding residents of the town, merchants, mine owners, and freighters; men whose influence had always been conspicuous in every effort toward the betterment of social conditions in the frontier

community. Then he went on, speaking to Wallace and Vance: "Tell them what 's up and have them come mounted, with their guns and plenty of ammunition and grub for at least four days." He paused, then added, ominously, "We will take ropes from the store here." Turning to Mr. Smith, he continued: "These men were all members of our Vigilance Committee the last time we had to act on a murder case, nearly a year ago. You were not here then, but now you will have to join,—you and these young fellows, too,—for I 've intrusted you with our organization, which nobody outside of it knows."

"But this sort of thing is lawless, Thurlow!" expostulated Mr. Smith. "Why not give the Territorial authorities at Helena a chance to act first?"

"The Territorial authorities!" exclaimed Thurlow, plainly irritated. "Don't you know it would take at least thirty-six hours to carry word of this outrage to Helena and thirty-six more for a posse to come down here? By that time the trail of this gang would be lost and they 'd be clear out of the country. No, no, Mr. Smith, the hand of the Territorial Government is n't strong enough yet even to keep high-

waymen from plying their trade on the streets of Helena, let alone being strong enough to reach out and enforce law a hundred miles away. That will come, and I hope it will come soon; but as yet, if we want life and property respected, we must enforce that respect ourselves, as we have had to do in the past."

The force of this logic was not to be denied. Mr. Smith acknowledged it and went to prepare himself for the pursuit, first placing in the cellar the few groceries kept upstairs which must not freeze, as the store was to be locked up while all within it, including Dr. Mahan, became vigilantes for the time being. Mr. Thurlow, who was a farmer and an educated man, was evidently a leader in the organization; and as he knew that Wallace and Vance had been soldiers and were good shots, he desired them both to be in the party.

Very soon men began riding up, hitching their horses and entering the store, where they greeted one another soberly and then stood either silent or conversing in low tones, as if they were at a funeral. All of them were swathed in fur garments; all of

them wore revolvers strapped outside their overcoats and either carried rifles or had left them slung to their saddles. Presently Wallace returned, then Vance, coming in from opposite directions. As the latter entered, one of the men standing before the stove stepped forward and facing Thurlow but speaking to Vance, said, with an excited tremor in his voice: "Is n't it true, young fellow, that you 're a deserter from the Rebel army?"

Vance, greatly surprised by the unexpected question, looked at the speaker and replied, "Yes, seh, it is."

The man nodded emphatically at the acknowledgment and, turning to Thurlow, went on: "I protest against this young man bein' one of us, Thurlow. He 's an unparoled Rebel; in effect he 's still a traitor to the United States. I protest he 's no fit person to join in protectin' the lives and property of American citizens here in Montana."

Mr. Thurlow looked out of the window a moment, then back at the speaker.

"It seems to me that 's carrying patriotism a little bit far, is n't it, Gormley?" said he. "The war is

over. It 's too late for that kind of feeling. I know you were a Union soldier, but so was I in '62, and most of us are willing to forgive and forget, like Wallace here. This boy has never made any traitorous utterances around here that I 've heard of. And how in the world, Gormley, can he become a paroled Rebel now, when the Rebel Government 's dead?"

Thurlow looked around at the others, who nodded approvingly. Gormley saw that sentiment was against him, but he replied, doggedly: "Don't make any difference. He ought to be purged some way before he joins into the sacredest rights of citizenship."

He spoke as if the pursuit and possible hanging of road agents were a blessed privilege, jealously to be guarded. Vance stepped forward and faced the speaker. His manner and, when he spoke, his voice were perfectly respectful, though a glint of Southern fire was in his eyes.

"Jest one moment, Misteh Gohmley, if yo' please, seh," said he. "Unde'stand me, I 'd mighty well like to help do justice to these fellows that shot Misteh Olson, but I don't want to if it 's goin' to hu't anybody's feelin's. I 've come to Montana jest like

hundreds of otheh ex-Confed'ates, as yo' know, to try and build up f'om the ruins of the wah. I can't speak fo' othehs; but fo' myself, I fought jest as long as they was a ghost of a show in fightin', and I ain't ashamed of it. But I neveh despised the United States flag; I always honohed it even when I fought it. And when I quit fightin' it, I quit fo' good, and they ain't a man heah this minute who 'll lift his hand quickeh than I will to defend it. As fo' bein' 'puhged,' my own common sense has puhged me, seems like to me; and if anything mo 's necessahy, I always reykoned that President Johnson's amnesty pro-cla-ma-tion ob-lit-er-ated the sins of the South.''

Despite the seriousness of their present mission, the delightful drawl with which Vance rounded out his last long words caused everyone to laugh, even Gormley, and preparations were resumed without any further protest regarding the part to be taken in the expedition by the young ex-Confederate.

Though by this time everyone in town undoubtedly knew of the night's tragedy and the preparations going forward to avenge it, not a face appeared at door or window as the cavalcade of seventeen mounted

men, four of them carrying coils of rope on their saddle horns, their horses almost wallowing in the deep snow, rode slowly away toward the northwest. By universal consent the vigilantes, whether they rode by night or by day, were consciously ignored by the community of whose security they were the only safeguards. No lawyer in the United States could have secured in all Bozeman a sworn statement as to the identity of a single member of that mounted party.

In less than an hour after leaving town, the men had silently viewed the body of poor Olson, lying as he had been found by Mr. Thurlow, and had struck off west across the divide on the trail of the five shod horses. Shortly after they left, a wagon followed them to the spot, and the men with it lifted the body in and carried it back to town.

The vigilantes camped that night in a pine wood, about twenty-four miles from Bozeman. They had traveled till after dark to reach it, so they camped without fires to avoid danger of discovery, and each man supped of the crackers and jerked beef which he had brought along. They had carried such provi-

sions because they were absolutely dry, while any food having moisture in it would have been frozen hard as a stone in the prevailing temperature, and could not have been used without fire to thaw it. The trail of the fugitives, where they had turned aside from it to enter the pine wood, was as plain as a highway; but none of the vigilantes believed that they were very close to the game as yet.

"They 're about twenty miles ahead of us to-night," said Mr. Thurlow, who seemed able to gauge the movements and reasoning of the men they were following with almost uncanny certainty. "We can probably catch them by day after tomorrow morning. They 've ridden hard today, they 'll sleep short tonight, and ride hard again tomorrow, though their horses won't stand as much as they did today. Then they 'll think they 're safe and put in a good night's rest, and we shall have our chance."

The party started again before daylight, glad enough to leave the cheerless bivouac, and, with several halts to rest the horses, traveled till after dark; by which time the trail had approached the Helena and Bannack City Road but did not cross it, turning

south, instead, and paralleling it several miles to the east. About noon they came upon the previous night's camping-place of the road agents, which, as Mr. Thurlow had predicted, was about twenty miles beyond their own night camp. During the afternoon they passed several places where the men ahead had rested. Indications were that these places had been left about five hours before the vigilantes reached them. Therefore it was evident that the fugitives were lagging a little, the pursuers gaining. At dark the latter rested for four hours and then pushed on, following the trail easily in the bright starlight.

A chinook wind had sprung up just after dusk, and the weather had turned much warmer. At three o'clock, when the morning star came rolling up the east, Mr. Thurlow took the lead, riding about one hundred feet in front of the rest and inspecting the country ahead from every little ridge before advancing upon it. An hour later he left his horse to be led and, accompanied by two other dismounted men, began walking several hundred yards in advance, cautioning the remainder of the party above all things not to let a horse whinny. Just as dawn com-

menced to redden the eastern horizon, the three advance scouts came cautiously back.

"They 're found," announced Thurlow, briefly. "They 're in a pine thicket on this next hillside, about five hundred yards ahead. They 've got a fire but they 're all asleep. Their horses are tied just the other side of them. Five of you hold our horses." He indicated the ones to do it, Mr. Smith being among the number. "The rest of you fellows follow me. Guns all ready?"

They were. Wallace and Vance were warmer than they had been for two days and nights past, with the hot blood of excitement pounding through their veins. Walking close on Mr. Thurlow's heels, the party set off, deflecting to the left to approach the road agents' resting-place through a scattered grove of pines. As they topped the hill, they could see the flicker of the low-burning camp fire ahead.

Forming a line so that every man might have free range for his weapon, the twelve crept forward with infinite caution. When within a hundred feet, a sound which seemed loud as a thunder-clap smote the straining ears of the vigilantes; a horse beyond the

camp fire had whinnied. Instantly one of the sleeping men, who, in their fur coats, were curled on the ground like bears, raised his head, then leaped to his feet with a loud oath.

"Hands up!" shouted Thurlow. "Every man is covered by three!"

The remaining bandits sprang erect, throwing their arms high, save one, who had evidently slept revolver in hand, for as he raised himself he began shooting. But he fired only once, for five or six rifles cracked and he rolled over by the edge of the smoldering fire. The line advanced at a run, surrounding the prisoners, stripping their coats back and securing their weapons.

"So you bossed this Olson job, did you, Peever?" asked Thurlow, as he thrust his hand into a coat pocket of one of the men, and drew out a heavy buckskin sack, filled with gold dust and nuggets. "I thought when we warned you out of the Territory last spring you 'd have sense enough not to come back to earn a rope's end."

The thin, evil face of the man Peever went white at first, but he quickly recovered his composure. He

knew quite well what this surprise in the dawn meant for him and his companions, but he seemed determined to enjoy to the full these few moments of distinction, even though they were to be his last.

"Too much easy money around these here parts, Thurlow," said he, with a grin. "It 's a lot quicker pickin' up the yaller stuff on the road than diggin' for it. I could n't keep away. But I never thought you 'd have the nerve to trail us this far, just for the fun o' stringin' us up. Somebody gimme a smoke, will yeh? I ain't had one in three days."

Tobacco sacks, pipes and cigars were instantly offered him by half-a-dozen hands. He took a cigar and lighted it with a stick from the fire. One of his companions stood, stupidly silent, his arms hanging limp at his sides, staring wide-eyed across the snow fields. The third man had dropped on the ground, shaking visibly, his head sunk in his coat. None of them were bound, but all of the vigilantes had their revolvers in hand as they stood around the prisoners. The search of the latter, three living and one dead, had brought forth from each a sack of nuggets and gold dust of something over two thousand dollars in

value, the divided spoil from the Olson robbery. Presently the man on the ground raised a face convulsed with animal terror. As he did so, Wallace gripped Vance by the arm. "My God, Vance!" he whispered. "It 's Jack Dowd!"

Vance started and uttered an unintelligible ejaculation. Then he looked toward the five horses of the bandits. "Theah 's suah yo' fatheh's hawse, too, Wallace," said he. "And that bay one is Chris Olson's."

As he recognized the boys, Jack Dowd suddenly flung himself to his knees and began to beg, wildly, desperately. Peever turned upon him with fierce scorn. "Aw, shut up, you whelp!" he growled. "What 's the use whimperin'? Can't yeh be game?"

Dowd subsided in a shivering heap; and Gormley said to Peever: "Was it you that shot Bob Brotherton up here near Diamond City last fall? That sounded like one of your jobs."

Peever glanced at the man with the limp arms standing beside him. "Shall I tell 'em, Frank?" he asked.

"Go ahead if yeh wanta," replied the other in a choked voice. "No use duckin' things now."

Peever turned back to Gormley. "Yes, it was," he answered, puffing his cigar. "Me and Frank here and Squinteye Pete." He indicated the dead man by the fire. "That was before Dowd hitched up with us. Understand, Dowd didn't have nothin' to do with that job. Me and Frank and Pete raked in close to fifteen thousand dollars off'n Brotherton, but we blowed it all in the next week, buckin' faro at Helena, so we had to take the road again."

"Who was next?" asked one of the vigilantes.

"A little Jew peddler down toward Deer Lodge. We didn't kill him; jest winged him and got a few hundred. Then,—Dowd was with us then,—we got two fellers goin' out with a prairie schooner, and they was rich. But they showed fight and we had to plug 'em. Their dust lasted us till we struck Olson."

"What were you heading down this way for?" asked Thurlow.

"We calcalated to make a grand finish and take a whirl at the Helena stage with the Wells-Fargo strong box on it," replied Peever, boastfully.

"She 's due south of Bannack on her way to Salt Lake about day after tomorrer, yeh know. Then we was goin' around by Fort Hall and work down the Snake for the coast."

There was a pause. Peever threw away his cigar butt. The five remaining men from Bozeman had by now brought up the horses. Peever looked at the ropes on the saddle horns and his mouth twisted grotesquely but he maintained his composure with nerves of steel. The vigilantes exchanged glances and Thurlow stepped forward.

"Peever," said he in an awed voice that shook a little, "this job must be done and done quick. Are you ready?"

"Ready as I ever will be. The sooner the better."

"Do you want to pray?"

"Not for me," answered the desperado, in a hard voice. "I never have, an' it 's too late to begin now."

The man called Frank silently acquiesced in what his leader had said. As for Dowd, he was beyond speech or reason, almost dead already with frantic terror.

It is better to draw the veil over that last dreadful scene of stern frontier justice, so sadly similar to a score of others which had been enacted and were still to be enacted before Montana could be purged of the black plague of crime that sickened her early life, and before she could take her proud place among the sisterhood of States and Territories in which life and property are sacredly guarded under the reign of law. When, a few hours later, the members of the Vigilance Committee, riding slowly with bowed heads and in silence, started back on their trail to Bozeman, four new made graves scarred the snow-covered face of the lonely hillside; witnesses crying out in the wilderness with the mute eloquence of fearful example the eternal truth that he who spills innocent blood in mad defiance of God and man shall surely one day taste the bitter dregs of retribution.

CHAPTER IX

THE FORT LARAMIE PEACE COUNCIL

SPRING had come. The snow was melting from the deep valleys and pine-crested hills of southwestern Montana, filling the steep watercourses winding down from the mountains with roaring torrents, and flooding the lowlands. Along the pleasant valley of the East Gallatin the farmers were preparing for spring work, and in Bozeman City itself stirrings of activity were replacing the lethargy of winter, as rumors came of rich diggings discovered on this or that creek or distant mountainside; and prospectors, eager with the hopes of another opening season for the pursuit of gold, began accumulating their provisions and filtering out of town singly or in parties, accompanied by trains of pack-mules or wagons.

In the general store of Samuel Smith & Son, the unusual rush of spring business so greatly depleted

every line of stock, that Mr. Smith found it imperative to renew them temporarily as far as possible from the wholesale houses at Fort Benton, the head of steamboat navigation on the Missouri River, nearly two hundred and fifty miles away. The trip, which became necessary in the latter part of April, was made by Mr. Smith with two wagons drawn by mules, two drivers accompanying him, while Wallace and Vance remained in charge of the store. The journey to Fort Benton and back, via Helena, consumed nearly a month, for the wagons could make but slow progress over roads deep in mud and often obstructed by swollen streams. Nor were its results very satisfactory, as the wholesale stocks of the Fort Benton stores were themselves nearly exhausted, no steamboats with fresh supplies having yet arrived from St. Louis, 2,600 miles distant by river. Even the *Luella,* the first boat up that spring, commanded by Captain Grant Marsh, the famous Missouri River steamboat-navigator, did not reach Fort Benton until June 17, nearly a month after Mr. Smith had started back for Bozeman.

The most annoying feature of the situation, how-

ever, was that the unexpected trip seriously delayed the carrying out of the plan which Mr. Smith and his son had formed for getting the rest of the family to Bozeman as early as possible in the summer and, at the same time, for bringing out from the East a complete stock of fresh merchandise to supply the store during the ensuing year. They had decided that Wallace should make the journey to the East, carrying with him explicit directions from his father as to the kinds and quantities of goods to purchase for the store. This decision was reached partly because Mr. Smith rather disliked the idea of the long, hard journey, which would be merely a pleasure to Wallace; and partly because the former was much the better qualified of the two to remain alone in Bozeman and conduct the business.

At first they cherished the hope that Wallace might be able to go East by the short route which they had traversed as far as Fort Connor with Colonel Sawyer, continuing thence to Fort Laramie and down to the Overland Road at Julesburg, Nebraska, from which point he could travel over the great highway to Omaha, where stage and rail connections to St.

Paul would be quick and easy. But the Bozeman Road had not been traveled since the previous autumn; no one could tell what its condition might be along the lonely reaches stretching past the bases of the Bighorn Mountains; and, more than all, there was danger from Indians, whose uncertain temper the Smiths had good cause to remember, even though it was confidently asserted that the red men were now peaceably disposed and were about to make a treaty selling the right of way for the road to the Government and guaranteeing its future safety.

The only course remaining, then, was for Wallace to make his journey by stage over the road running south from Helena to Fort Bridger, Utah, near Salt Lake City, and thence east either on the branch of the Overland Road known as the Bridger's Pass Road or else on the original California Trail through South Pass, which branches united again at Julesburg. They made all plans, however, for him to return with his wagons and the family by the Bozeman Road, as news was positive that the latter route would be fully acquired from the Indians, put in good condition for traveling and suitably protected by

several garrisoned forts, by early summer. Since by this route the distance from Fort Laramie to Bozeman was only about four hundred and fifty miles while by Fort Bridger it was eight hundred miles, the saving was a matter of much importance to a train of loaded wagons, and such had been the growth of their business that Wallace expected to bring back with him not less than ten wagons.

It had been anticipated that Wallace would start for the East about the first of May, but owing to the delay occasioned by his father's Fort Benton trip, it was the thirty-first of the month when the two finally stood together on the street before a hotel in Helena, waiting for the stagecoach to arrive. On the board walk, at Wallace's feet, lay his portmanteaus and securely fastened in one of his inside pockets was a circular note for a large amount of money issued by a Helena bank on a bank in Omaha, Mr. Smith having wisely decided that his son should carry no more specie than necessary to pay his traveling expenses, as there was much more than a remote chance that the stage and its passengers might be held up by road agents somewhere along the way.

"Now, Wallace," said Mr. Smith, "as I have said before, even if you have to wait a little longer at Fort Bridger for a stage by way of the California Trail through the Great South Pass to Fort Laramie, than you would for one by Bridger's Pass, you had better take the time. As nearly as we have been able to make out from the maps, you know, the new Bozeman Road branches off from the California Trail nearly one hundred and sixty miles northwest of Julesburg; and from the point of branching to Fort Connor is only about eighty miles. So you will be able to see a hundred and sixty miles of the road you will have to travel with the family; and, as you have already been over the route from Fort Connor to Bozeman, only eighty miles of the entire distance will be unknown to you. Of course, you could probably get East a little quicker by Bridger's Pass, but you wouldn't see anything of the route you will have to travel with wagons until you get east of Julesburg on the Overland Road, and there is little need to see that, it is so heavily traveled and well supplied with ranches and other stopping-places. With fairly good luck you ought to reach Julesburg in two weeks,

traveling by these fast stages, for the coaches of the Overland Mail Stage Line give wonderfully quick service from Fort Bridger on. Of course, you will get from Julesburg to Omaha in short order, perhaps even in five days; it 's about three hundred and seventy-five miles. You might take the Pacific Railroad train at Fremont; but that is only forty-five miles from Omaha, so you would n't save much time. From Omaha to Des Moines, Iowa, will be a hundred and forty miles more by stage—perhaps two days' travel—and from there you ought to get to St. Paul by rail in a couple of days. So you can figure, barring accidents, on seeing the folks in a little over three weeks, say a month."

"I only hope I shan't be delayed by Indian raids," said Wallace, who was smiling and happy, whatever might be in store. "But perhaps they 're not as bad now along the Overland Road as they were last year."

"I earnestly hope you will not be delayed by Indians or any other dangers, Wallace," Mr. Smith replied. "Whatever you do, my boy, don't imperil your life by taking any unnecessary chances merely

in order to get along faster," he added, seriously. "You are not inclined to be very cautious, you know."

Wallace smiled affectionately at his father. "Perhaps not," said he, "but I 've had a good deal of experience in getting out of scrapes, and I 'll try to keep on that way. Certainly I won't run any unnecessary risks, father. Here comes the stage, so it 's good-by, and good luck! Let 's hope we 'll meet again soon in a grand family reunion. There are mother's prayers, you know."

The big Concord stagecoach, drawn by four powerful and spirited horses, came swinging up before the hotel with a great clatter of hoofs and harness, the passengers took their places in its restricted interior, their baggage was stowed in the leather-covered boot at the rear end, the express company's strong box was thrown to the top of the stage and strapped in place, and the express guard, armed like an arsenal with rifle and revolvers, climbed up to his seat beside the driver. Then the latter removed his foot from the brake lever, cracked his long whip and the coach rattled away down the street, Wallace lean-

ing out and waving his hand to his father as they turned the corner below.

To an older man, or one reared in a city and unaccustomed to the physical discomforts and hardships so often encountered on the frontier, the journey would have seemed a long and trying one, indeed. But Wallace enjoyed it from the first moment, for it was full of novel experiences and strange, ever-changing sights. Passing through the dilapidated streets of Bannack City, the pioneer mining camp of Montana, only four years old and once a place of thousands of people, but already nearly deserted; crossing the Bitter Root Mountains and swinging down the valley of the upper Snake River to the barracks of Fort Hall; winding along the passes through the Bear River Mountains and down beside the lake and the river of the same name into bustling Fort Bridger, the road presented many scenes of enchanting natural beauty. Fortunately for Wallace and his traveling companions, their enjoyment was not disturbed by either road agents or Indians, and Wallace was lucky enough to arrive at Fort Bridger just in time to catch the stage for Fort Laramie. Five

days later, after climbing up the valley of Pacific Creek, crossing the Continental Divide at the Great South Pass and then riding for more than seventy-two hours along the banks of the Sweetwater and the North Platte Rivers, past the rugged ranges of the Sweetwater Mountains and Rattlesnake Hills, Independence Rock, Red Buttes, and Fort Caspar, he alighted from the coach one June morning and looked around upon the broad parade ground, the far-stretched barracks and warehouses, the commodious officers' quarters and towering flagstaff of the largest and most important army post within a radius of many hundreds of miles.

It was just past eight o'clock when Wallace walked across the parade ground to the office of the stage company beyond the buildings of the garrison, to purchase his ticket for Julesburg and inquire when the next stage would leave for that place, for the one on which he had just arrived ended its journey at Fort Laramie and returned thence to the West. As he passed along, he noticed a large platform of pine boards, covered with benches and overarched by a bower of green pine boughs, standing in front of one

of the barracks. Around the platform, on the ground, were many more benches, among which a large number of Indians were sitting or standing idly, as if waiting for something. There were few white men in the vicinity except for two sentinels on the platform, walking slowly back and forth with muskets at right shoulder arms. Wallace found the stage office in the large post traders' store of Bullock & Ward, where the clerk who waited upon him said, in answer to his question, "The next stage for Julesburg leaves here at six o'clock to-morrow morning. The one for to-day has been gone for over two hours."

Wallace had been somewhat prepared for this news by the driver of the stage on which he had come in, who said that they were probably too late to make the connection for the south that day. But he had still hoped that some delay of the Julesburg stage might give him time to catch it. Noticing his look of disappointment, the clerk went on: "I don't believe you 'll find it a bit stupid staying over here to-day. You know the treaty council with the Sioux and Cheyennes and Arapahoes is going on now; has been

for some days. The Peace Commissioners and the Indians meet every day on that platform over there," he pointed through the window to the bough-shaded structure which Wallace had passed. "The councils meet at ten o'clock in the morning, and they 're interesting to watch; most all the big chiefs are here, and there are thousands of Indians camped near the fort, waiting for things to be fixed up. Take in the show while you 're waiting for the stage."

He smiled as he gave the advice and then, turning, immediately began to speak Cheyenne to a stately old Indian wrapped in a blanket, who had come to the counter intent on bartering a couple of fox skins which he held in his hand for their utmost value in peppermint stick candy and brass nails.

Wallace walked out and, after getting his breakfast at the public eating house near by, sauntered around the post, looking at the barracks and the many men about them dressed in the familiar blue uniform of the army, passing the comfortable dwellings of Officers' Row, inspecting the stables and finally going out on the edge of the plain to look at the vast camp of Indian lodges and, nearer by, the long trains

of emigrant wagons bound for Montana, which were waiting to learn whether the Bozeman Road was to be opened, before going ahead. Coming back upon the parade ground, he saw that many people, white as well as Indian, were now gathering around the council platform. As it was about half-past nine o'clock, he went over, chose a seat where he could both see and hear the proceedings, and settled himself to wait.

Presently a man took a seat beside Wallace and at length dropped a casual remark, and they fell into conversation. The stranger was somewhat more carefully dressed than the average civilian of the Far West; his eyes were keen but pleasant, and he spoke in a low, clear voice which Wallace could hear distinctly above the confused chatter of the crowd of white men and Indians about them.

"I 've been waiting here six days for my freight train to get in from Omaha," this man stated. "It 's bringing the machinery for a six-stamp mill that I 'm going to set up on my quartz claim in the Wind River Mountains, just north of South Pass. It 'll be a pioneer stamp mill, sure enough, in that country, but it 'll pay; my quartz is as rich as I ever

saw. While I 've been waiting I 've been taking in the sessions of this peace council, and I 'm glad I 've been here. It 's an important council for us, all over the Northwest. If the commissioners can get these Indians to make a general peace, it 'll give a big lift to the development of the country clear from the Arkansas River up to Montana, and it 'll free the Overland Road of the everlasting attacks on trains and stages that have kept so many people from coming West."

"It will be a big help to the builders of the Pacific Railroad, too, won't it?" asked Wallace. "They can build much faster if they 're not interrupted by having to fight Indians."

His companion looked at him with a doubtful smile. "I 'm afraid neither you nor I will live long enough ever to go clear across the continent by railroad," said he. "It is n't the Indians, though, that 'll keep it from going through; it 's engineering difficulties. I know General Grenville M. Dodge, who resigned from the army only a couple of weeks ago to become chief engineer of the railroad; I 've met Governor Leland Stanford, of California, President of the Cen-

tral Pacific, in a business way, and I know C. P. Huntington and Oakes Ames and Sidney Dillon and Mark Hopkins and others of the promoters as well by reputation as if they were personal acquaintances. They 're big men, capable men, and they could accomplish almost anything within reason. But I 'm afraid they 've undertaken a bigger job on this railroad proposition than they or anybody else can carry through. They may get the Eastern end built from Omaha to Julesburg, but they 'll never get it across the mountains; never."

"Well, I don't know about that," answered Wallace, thoughtfully. "I believe Yankee ingenuity and grit can accomplish pretty nearly anything, and I look to see that railroad finished inside of ten years."

The other smiled again and shook his head at Wallace's enthusiasm and seemingly rash prediction. Then he changed the subject.

"Anyway," said he, "I think the most important subject before this council is the question of getting the Bozeman Road opened up into Montana. It 'll be an immense benefit to that country."

"Yes, it will," agreed Wallace. "I 'm from Bozeman myself, and we 're vitally concerned in it up there."

"Is that so?" said the other. "Then you 'll be interested in the proceedings to-day, for the Bozeman Road is what they 'll talk about, as they have been doing for the past two or three days. The Ogalalla Sioux are the ones who mainly occupy that fine buffalo country up along the east side of the Bighorns, and they 're here in force. They were all dead against allowing the road to go through at first, but the commissioners have argued until I believe the Indians will give in to-day. Anyway, here come the commissioners now, and we 'll see for ourselves."

As he spoke, Wallace saw six gentlemen making their way through the crowd of onlookers from the direction of Officers' Row. They ascended the steps of the platform, walked to the long table at one end of it, arranged their chairs, and took their seats with an air of accustomed familiarity. Meanwhile they were talking casually among themselves.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Wallace, as he looked over the faces of the commissioners, his eyes resting

upon one of them. "If there is n't Colonel McLaren!"

"Yes," returned the other. "Do you know him?"

"Oh, no; not personally," Wallace explained. "But he used to command the Second Minnesota Cavalry and was with General Sully on his campaign against the Sioux in 'sixty-four. I was there, too, a private in the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, so I 've seen the Colonel often. Who are the others?"

"Well, the one in the middle is E. B. Taylor, the President of the commission and also Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Northern Superintendency, at Omaha. The army officer on his right is Colonel Maynardier of the Fifth United States Volunteers, who is in command here at Fort Laramie; and the other one is Mr. Wistar. The two on this side are Mr. Bowles, the Secretary, and his assistant, Mr. Lehmer. Ah, here come the Indians!" he went on, with livelier interest. "I don't know all of them, by any means, but I certainly know this first one coming up the steps. He 's the biggest gun in the outfit—Spotted Tail, head chief of the Brule Sioux."

With keen interest Wallace looked at the stately,

broad-chested red man, clothed in all the trappings of barbaric magnificence, who strode with slow dignity across the platform, his head proudly erect, and after solemnly shaking hands with each of the commissioners, seated himself. Wallace heard his companion saying:

"Spotted Tail is in favor of the road treaty, and that 's what gives it its best chance of success. I 'll tell you in a minute, a little romance about why he is in favor; but here come some more. I don't know these next ones, but two are Cheyennes and two are Ogalalla Sioux. This chap 's a Yanktonais; don't know his name. Here comes Swift Bear, a Brule. Here are some Arapahoes. That next one 's Big Mouth, and he is; talks long and often. This fellow —I don't know but I 've noticed him before. Is n't that a frightful scar down his left cheek and neck?"

Wallace started and paled a little as a gigantic warrior, of as regal bearing as Spotted Tail, slowly mounted the platform. Through Wallace's mind flashed a burning recollection of a late afternoon in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri when he had stood for twenty minutes with his friend, Al Briscoe,

and an Indian interpreter before a group of hostile Sioux, while the lives of himself and his companions hung upon the nod of the Indian he saw before him now.

"You may not know him," Wallace said, quietly, to the man beside him. "But I do."

"You do?" asked the other surprised.

"Yes. He is Te-o-kun-ko—The Swift—an Upper Yanktonais. He is against the treaty."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know him," Wallace stated with conviction.

"Well, he looks like an ugly customer."

"He is, and he is n't," Wallace said, his mind busy with recollections. "He 's a thinker, though. I want to see him when the council 's over. Who is this man, do you know?"

He asked the question as a chief of distinguished bearing, with rather heavy features but alert eyes and a determined jaw, came upon the platform more briskly than the rest.

"I guess I do know him!" exclaimed the other. "If anybody stops the Bozeman Road, he will be the

man. That 's Red Cloud, an Ogalalla. He and Spotted Tail are the two biggest chiefs in the Sioux Nation, but Red Cloud 's taking the lead of the opponents of the road and is getting a large following all to himself. However, the commissioners got rather the best of him yesterday, and he may come around. The medium-sized man with him is his right bower, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses."

In a few moments the council went into session, and Wallace watched and listened with deep interest, as now one of the commissioners and then one of the chiefs arose and spoke. The proceedings were conducted with the utmost dignity, and the speeches proceeded slowly; for each one had to be translated by the interpreters, phrase by phrase, into English, Sioux, Cheyenne or Arapahoe, as the case might be. In the main they seemed to be discussing, not whether or no the road should be permitted to go through, but how much the Government should pay the Indians for the privilege, and other details. The faces of the many Montana emigrants in the crowd were brightening perceptibly, for it seemed evident that the prospects were excellent for the immediate

and peaceful opening of the road which they were waiting to travel over. Finally one of the lesser chiefs launched forth in a long and rather wandering talk. As the interest of the white people in the surrounding crowd relaxed, Wallace turned to his companion and asked in a low tone: "What was that romance about Spotted Tail you were going to tell me?"

"Oh, I 'd nearly forgotten that," the other answered. "Why, it seems that sometime ago, I don't know exactly when, a year or so, maybe, Spotted Tail came down here to Laramie and brought with him his only daughter, a very pretty girl for an Indian, they say. The old man was pretty bitter then about all the roads that were being run through the Indian country, and stood right up with Red Cloud in opposing them. But while they were here, that daughter of his fell head over heels in love with a young army officer in the garrison; I won't mention any names. But, of course, a young West Pointer, with social position and military ambitions, did n't take much stock in such Pocahontas business. He gave her the cold shoulder and broke her heart, so the

"Oh!" said the man with Wallace. "It 's General Henry B. Carrington, Brigadier General of Volunteers and Colonel of the Eighteenth United States Infantry. He 's bringing the Second Battalion of his regiment up to build forts along the new road; but I did n't know he was near here yet."

There was some talk on the platform; then Wallace heard General Carrington say, emphatically, in answer to a question by one of the commissioners: "No, sir, I cannot await the result of the council. My orders from General Pope are imperative, to push on to the Tongue River with no delay."

A little more unintelligible talk followed; then Mr. Taylor turned toward the Indian chiefs and, through the interpreter, introduced General Carrington and briefly explained his mission, the General himself meantime facing them, erect and attentive. As the explanation proceeded, first surprise, and then anger and resentment began to show in the faces and actions of the Indians, while the commissioners looked disturbed and anxious. Mr. Taylor concluded and began conducting the General around to shake hands with the chiefs when suddenly everyone,

white and red, on the platform and in the curious crowd around it, almost ceased breathing as they fixed their eyes upon an Indian who had stepped forward into the center of the stage facing General Carrington but several yards from him. It was Red Cloud. His blanket was dropped around his waist, his head thrown up, his eyes blazing. After a dramatic pause, he slowly raised his hand and, pointing his finger at General Carrington, said in ringing accents, which the interpreter quickly made intelligible: "I will not shake hands with you. You are the white eagle who has come to steal the road. The Great Father sends us presents and wants us to sell him the road; but white chief comes with soldiers to steal it before the Indian says yes or no! I will talk no more. I and my people will go now and we will fight you. While I live I will fight you for the last hunting ground of my people."

The commissioners crowded toward him remonstratingly, pleading for delay, for explanations. Spotted Tail, Big Mouth, and Swift Bear stretched detaining hands toward him. But Red Cloud drew his blanket over his shoulders, turned his back on the

commissioners, and, followed by Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, Te-o-kun-ko, and a number of other chiefs, walked down from the platform, across the parade ground, and away to the camp of the Ogalallas.

"That means war," said Wallace's companion, solemnly. "Red Cloud is right, when you come down to it. That Bighorn country has always been the Indians' best hunting ground, and it 's his last one now, too. The Government is crazy to force troops into it before the Indians consent."

"Yes," agreed Wallace, with dejection, "it looks like war. But," he added, more hopefully, "General Carrington and his troops can make the road safe. The Indians will give it up soon when they find the Government means business, and probably not many of them will fight, anyway."

There was no seeing Te-o-kun-ko that day; he had gone with the hostiles, and in his heart Wallace did not blame either him or them. Before he left Fort Laramie on the Julesburg stage he knew that Red Cloud and a host of followers had struck their tepees and gone northward, declaring that if troops crossed the Powder River they would be attacked

and war to the knife would begin. As if to test the sincerity of the threat without delay, General Carrington with seven hundred men of the Eighteenth Infantry passed the fort, marching in haste, and camped for the night nine miles beyond it, on the line of the Bozeman Road.

CHAPTER X

JIM BRIDGER'S ADVICE

TEN days later, after a tedious and roundabout journey by stagecoach and rail, Wallace arrived in St. Paul. The joy of once more seeing his mother and of meeting his young brother and sister, who had grown almost beyond his recognition, was very sweet to Wallace after having been away from them for more than a year. But there was little chance for visiting except in the evenings; for Wallace was not one to idle, and he realized that much work and a long, hard journey were before them at the best ere they could reach the new home in Montana, while no one could foresee what delays might beset them on such a journey to defer their arrival at their destination.

Hurry as he might, and ably seconded in his efforts as he was by his capable mother, it was the third of July before Wallace had all the family household

goods packed and loaded on the freight cars which were to take them to Des Moines, Iowa, the railroad terminus at that time nearest to Omaha on the east. Wallace and the rest then set out by passenger train for the same point, traveling with no attempt at haste. Nevertheless, four weary days passed in Des Moines before the freight car put in its appearance and Wallace could transfer its contents to the two Conestoga wagons which he had ready and waiting. A week more of traveling over the rough gumbo roads of southern Iowa brought them, at last, to Omaha.

Wallace now felt that he could reasonably believe most of the delays to be past, and he energetically set about purchasing, in the large wholesale houses of Omaha, the long list of goods which his father had instructed him to procure for their store. It was already past the middle of July, and even under the best of conditions it would take them about seven weeks, or until the early part of September, to reach Bozeman. But, as so often happens, unforeseen obstacles arose before him. One evening after they had been several days in Omaha, he came back to the

boarding house where he was stopping with his mother and the children, tired and dejected after his long day in the unaccustomed rush and confusion of the business district.

"I 've bought a lot of stuff the last few days," he told his mother when they sat down after supper; "enough to fill six freight wagons, I think. And I 've got the wagons, ten of them, good ones, too, and can get the oxen whenever I want them. Think of it! Ten wagons and sixty oxen! The investment is something awful for us, but, of course, we can sell them in Montana for twice what they cost here. But, as for the goods, I 've simply bought every single thing I can get in Omaha that we want, and the rest is n't to be had here. Boots—that 's the worst thing. I 've got overcoats and mackinaw coats and shirts, cotton and flannel, and even dress shoes. But we don't sell one pair of dress shoes to twenty pairs of leather boots, rubber boots, or lumber jacks, felt socks with arctics, and I can't get a dozen pairs of them in Omaha."

"Why, that 's strange, Wallace," said his mother, looking up from her work on a muslin dress she was

making for Bessie. "I should think there would be any quantity of them sold in the West."

"That 's just the trouble," returned Wallace. "There 's such an enormous demand for them that the Omaha stores are all sold out on them. In half-a-dozen places I 've been told to-day that there won't be good stocks of such footwear in here again for a month—perhaps even longer—and that the very nearest place I can get them promptly is St. Louis."

"St. Louis!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, with some dismay. "Why, Wallace, it would take you a long time to go there and come back."

"I know it, mother, but I can probably get the stuff quicker that way than by waiting here, with no certainty of securing what I need even at the end of a month. I can go to St. Louis by rail from Des Moines—it will take me three or four days from here—and it probably will not require over a week to get back by steamboat with my shipment of goods."

This seemed to be the only solution of the difficulty; so next day Wallace started for St. Louis. But even here delays beset him in getting together

the stock he wanted, and when it was ready he had to wait several days for a Missouri River packet bound for Omaha. He spent his leisure time pleasantly in visiting with the mother and young brother and sister of his friend of Minnesota and Dakota Indian-fighting days, Al Briscoe, who was now in his second year at West Point. When he reached Omaha again, August was more than half spent, and it cost him much effort and industry to gather his cattle, hire his drivers, load his wagons, and finally to pull out on the Overland Road just before the beginning of September.

Late in the summer though it was, fortune seemed now for a time to smile on Wallace's little train. The road was in good condition, the weather ideal, and for nearly three weeks the oxen steadily reeled off twenty miles of travel per day. By no means were they alone on the road, for other trains, belonging to emigrants or freighters, were almost constantly in sight along the level miles bordering the Platte River; and often Wallace and his party camped for the night in company with other wayfarers westward bound. Daily the big mail stages

passed them, with clatter of hoofs and creaking of leather springs; always the wire of the transcontinental telegraph line hummed on its poles beside the road; and for days they traveled in sight of the track and the speeding trains of the Pacific Railroad. At length, near Grand Island, they passed the moving town always located near "track end," with its mass of dingy tents and board shacks, housing the sleeping quarters, eating-booths, saloons, dance halls, and other resorts of the army of railroad-builders. Then, close beyond, they came to the puffing engines and long strings of flat-cars of the construction trains, and the great gangs of workmen stringing and spiking rails; then to those laying ties; then to graders, with their two-horse wheeled and shovel scrapers, their plows and spades and picks; and finally to the surveyors, running the levels and staking the grade. And so, at last, they passed beyond all the bustling activity that marked the steady progress of the westward-creeping railway and plodded onward with their ox-teams along the smooth, unbroken prairie, whose silences had never yet been broken by the whistle of the locomotive, which in a few more weeks

or months would rudely disturb the wilderness solitude.

On the September afternoon when Wallace reached Fort Laramie with his train, having passed Julesburg five days before, he was feeling quite jubilant. He had suffered no serious delay in all the long trip from Omaha, his journey was already half completed and if he met with equal good fortune on the remainder of it he would be in Bozeman in less than a month, easily before any heavy snow would obstruct the road or cold weather render traveling unpleasant. Between Julesburg and Fort Laramie he had encountered no travelers going the other way, and therefore had no recent news of events along the Bozeman Road. The prairie close around the fort had been closely grazed by the animals of the many trains which had camped there during the summer; so Wallace drew up his wagons some distance from the road and a mile or more below the fort, where there was still grass, and then, after seeing the cattle turned out in charge of two herders to keep them from wandering, he rode up to the fort on horseback to learn what he could about the condition of

the road beyond, and the temper of the Indians along it.

Meeting no one who appeared likely to possess the information he sought, he presently went to the headquarters building and entered the office of the post adjutant. That officer was not in, but a sergeant major, as straight and almost as slender as a ramrod, and wearing a close cropped, grizzled mustache, looked up from the large blank-book in which he was writing as Wallace entered. Behind the soldier, sitting on the ledge of a window, smoking a short black pipe, sat an old man dressed in a fringed buckskin suit. A broad-brimmed black felt hat was tilted on the back of his head, a fringe of gray beard encircled his cheeks and chin, his nose was large and prominent, his mouth thin and straight, his small eyes very alert. These details Wallace took in at a glance, then he said to the sergeant major, "Good afternoon. Can you tell me whether everything is safe for going ahead with a train tomorrow on the Bozeman Road?"

The veteran soldier regarded him with cold curiosity for a moment, then permitted himself the lux-

ury of a frigid smile. "If your train 's got an escort equal to a squadron of cavalry and a couple of sections of field guns, perhaps it 's safe," he replied, deliberately. "But I would n't guarantee it, even then."

Wallace's face showed surprise and dismay. "Why?" he asked. "Are the Indians bad?"

"So bad that the weekly mail can't be gotten through to Fort Reno and Fort Phil Kearney without a good sized escort, and sometimes not even then."

Wallace knew that Fort Reno was the new name of Fort Connor, established the year before on Powder River, and that Fort Philip Kearney was the post recently occupied by General Carrington on the Big Piney Fork of the Powder, some sixty-five miles beyond Fort Reno. But that Indian hostilities were in progress around them he did not know.

"I 've just come from Omaha," he said. "I have n't had any news except sometime back in Eastern newspapers, and that was that everything was peaceful along the Bozeman Road."

The old man in the window changed his position impatiently.

"Thar it is," he broke in, angrily. "Folks back East hev got a notion thar ain't a hostyle redskin north of the Platte from the Missouri to the mountings, jest becuz some fools in Washin'ton want it understood thet the Laramie Treaty made 'em all good Injins. Thar 's more war now between the North Platte an' the Bighorn than thar is in all the rest o' the yarth put together."

The sergeant major looked at Wallace significantly. "You hear what Major Bridger says," he remarked. "He knows."

Wallace turned his glance upon the old frontiersman in the window with sudden and lively interest. "Is this Major James Bridger?" he inquired, remembering the many stories he had heard of the famous plainsman, fur-trader and Indian-fighter whose name was preserved in such well-known localities of the Northwest as Fort Bridger, Bridger's Ferry, and Bridger's Pass.

"Jim Bridger; yes," corrected the other, with democratic simplicity.

"My name 's Wallace Smith, and I live at Bozeman, Major Bridger," explained Wallace, eager for

more detailed information than he had yet received. "My father is up there now, and I 've just reached here with ten wagons of freight. I 've got five drivers along, all well armed, and my mother and little brother and sister. Don't you suppose we can get through with that many men?"

Major Bridger removed the pipe from his lips and expectorated in the cuspidor beside the sergeant major's desk before replying. Then he said, slowly and impressively: "Young feller, I 'd sooner take a woman an' drap her over the big falls o' the Missouri than take her up Bozeman's Trail right now. She 'd hev a better chanct of livin'. The Injun varmints are thicker 'n blackberries all around Reno an' Kearney. Thar 's nary a citizen train goes through the last two moons without fightin'. Right lately I 've been up amongst the Crows on Clark's Fork an' the Yallerstone, an' I know from them how many Sioux an' Cheyennes is war dancin' along the Tongue an' the Powder. You better go around to Bozeman by South Pass."

"Why, it 's too late," Wallace replied. "It would

take me into November and then I 'd be stopped by snows in the mountains."

"Thet 's so, fer sartin'," agreed Bridger, slowly. "Thar 's more snow over in the Bitter Roots than what thar is up this way. Course, ye kin git through yerself up there, all right, on horseback. I 'm goin' up to Kearney tomorrer with the mail escort, ef it gits in tonight."

Noting Wallace's expression of baffled perplexity, the sergeant major now said to him, "You might go and see Colonel Palmer. He 's in command here now, you know. I think he 's in his office down this hall, though he may be over at his quarters."

Wallace found the commanding officer in his office. After he had introduced himself and explained his dilemma, the Colonel said: "Bridger is about right, my boy, though I think he overestimates the dangers somewhat. Military trains and even citizen trains have been going up to Fort Phil Kearney and Fort C. F. Smith, on the Bighorn, and thence to Montana throughout the last two months. To be sure, they 've had some fights, and it is n't safe to go with

small parties, but large ones can undoubtedly get through. Why don't you wait until thirty or forty more wagons come in that want to go up and then all go together?"

"I might do that, Colonel," answered Wallace, 'but it may be quite a while before that many wagons come in; and besides, I don't want to expose my mother and the children to any danger."

"Well, of course, you will have to be your own judge as to that," returned Colonel Palmer. "There is undoubtedly some danger. But it is my opinion that the road will be perfectly safe before long, anyway. Red Cloud and his Indians will get discouraged and give up the fight when they find they can't drive the troops away; and they 'll soon discover that."

Wallace turned to a window and stood for some moments looking out over the barren parade ground, lost in thought, while the Colonel went on writing. Finally the officer looked up again as Wallace turned to him and asked, "Colonel, how long would it take me to go to Bozeman on horseback, traveling with the mail escort?"

"About ten days, I should judge. The mail es-

corts are under orders to make fifty miles a day, though they can't always do it. But what good will it do you to go to Bozeman alone?"

"I want to see my father. I 'm afraid the way things are shaping I may not be able to get my train to Bozeman before deep snows come. My father may want to come down here himself to look after taking the family and the wagons through, now that it seems such a serious trip. At any rate, he may be able to get some goods either at Fort Benton or Helena to tide us over until I can get the train up myself. I ought to be able to be back here in three weeks. Is there any kind of a boarding house here where my folks can stay in the meantime?"

"Oh, yes. There are a number of civilians living outside the fort. You can probably arrange it with some of them."

"Well, then, I believe that is what I 'll do. I 'll go back to my train now and talk it over with my mother. You expect the mail party in from Fort Phil Kearney tonight, Colonel?"

"Yes, it is past due now, and, if it has n't been delayed too much it will start back in the morning."

Wallace returned to his wagons in a very dejected frame of mind. Here he was, delayed for an indefinite period and all his plans overthrown, just as he was beginning to feel that his journey was practically assured of early and successful completion. It was most exasperating, but it could not be helped. Mrs. Smith, naturally, was greatly disturbed and disappointed by the news which Wallace brought. Not only was she anxious to see her husband after their long separation, but she also wanted at least a little time before cold weather set in, to arrange the home and set up housekeeping in the new country. But after a short time devoted to vain protests against the unkind fortune which brought this difficulty upon them, she resigned herself philosophically to the delay and went with Wallace to look for a temporary stopping-place in the meager and scattered frontier settlement outside the fort. They met with better success in the search than they had dared hope for, finding a house—and a frame house, at that, not a log one—presided over by a pleasant-faced Pennsylvania German woman, whose husband was away from home a great deal of the time with his party

of laborers, cutting hay in summer and wood in winter on contract with the Government for supplying the garrisons at Fort Laramie, Fort Caspar, and Fort Sanders. Here Mrs. Smith secured board and a room large enough to accommodate herself and the children. The wagons were brought up to a point near by, and Wallace arranged with his drivers to remain in his employ and look after the stock until his return.

The mail party, meantime, had come in as expected, so very early the next morning, after bidding good-by to his dear ones, Wallace rode into the fort to meet the men with whom he was going to make the journey to Fort Phil Kearney. He was mounted on Sandy, the long-legged sorrel riding-horse he had bought in Omaha, and he carried provisions and extra ammunition in two well-stuffed saddle bags hanging in front of the saddle. His sixteen-shot Henry rifle was thrust in a cavalry carbine boot hung below the saddle pommel, his revolver and cartridge belts were strapped around his waist, and a pair of field glasses hung in their case over his shoulder.

CHAPTER XI

THE TROUBLED ROAD TO KEARNEY

IT was in the ghostly gray of dawn that Wallace rode up to the little group of horses and men gathered in front of the long stables and, dismounting, said to a soldier who was busy tightening up his saddle cinch, "Is this the mail escort for Fort Phil Kearney?"

"Yes," replied the man.

"Who is in command?"

"Van Volzah. Anyhow, he 's the mail carrier and we 're under his orders. That 's him, there by the door, with the mail sack."

Wallace walked over to the man indicated and introduced himself. A second man turned as he came up, and Wallace saw that it was Major Bridger.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Smith," said Van Volzah, in a gentle voice. "General Palmer told me about you. You want to go up to Phil Kearney with us?"

"Yes," answered Wallace, "if I shall not be a nuisance."

"You don't look like a nuisance with that outfit," said Van Volzah with a smile, peering approvingly through the gloom at Wallace's equipment.

"Did ye ever shoot them things at a live Injin, young feller?" asked Bridger, taking in the rifle and revolver.

"Yes, sir, several times," Wallace returned, quietly.

"Wall, ye 'll likely git another chanct soon," Bridger said, pointedly. "Keep 'em well 'iled."

In a few moments the men were all ready, and, mounting, they rode slowly away like shadows across the broad parade ground. At the north limits of the post the sentry halted them sharply, and Van Volzah rode forward and said, in answer to his challenge, "United States mail carrier and escort for Fort Philip Kearney."

Then they passed and trotted out upon the broad, desolate valley road running northwestward. The channel of the North Platte, still misty with night shadows, was upon their right hand, and beyond it

the crimsoning east, throwing into silhouette outline the rugged buttes and bluffs beyond the river. All told, there were nine men in the party; Van Volzah, Bridger and Wallace, and six soldiers of General Carrington's Eighteenth Infantry. Below Fort Reno no danger was apprehended from Indians, as their avowed hostility was confined to that post and the two new ones beyond it, in the buffalo country. Therefore the mail party went ahead with no attempt at precautions other than keeping a sharp lookout on the surrounding country; all effort was directed to making as rapid progress as possible, so as to compensate for the delay which might occur later on in the country where more careful traveling would become necessary. Ten o'clock found them at Little Bitter Cottonwood Creek, and at four in the afternoon they crossed the deep, swift current of the North Platte on the cable-boat at Bridger's Ferry, fifty-two miles from Fort Laramie. The next four hours were hard ones for the weary horses, and at eight o'clock, after total darkness had descended, when night bivouac was made on the left bank of the

North Platte, they had only added sixteen miles to the total for the day.

As he slipped wearily from his saddle, Wallace thought of the fact that this exhausting journey was a part of the weekly duties of the slender garrison at Fort Phil Kearney, and he began faintly to realize something of the toils to which the men there must be subjected. Toughened though he was to the rigors of frontier traveling, it seemed to him that he had barely laid his head on his saddle and fallen asleep when he felt a hand shaking him roughly by the shoulder, and Major Bridger's voice said in his ear, "Wake up, Smith! wake up! We 've got to git off in fifteen minutes. H'ist some forage inter ye an' saddle up."

It was pitch dark when Wallace, reaching into his saddlebags, hastily snatched out some food, then saddled Sandy by sense of feeling and rode him to the river to drink, in company with the other horses of the party. Before the faintest sign of daylight had come, they were off. At noon they halted for a short rest on the South Fork of the Cheyenne, hav-

ing crossed the high, barren divide between that stream and the North Platte. When the night halt was finally made they had reached the Dry Fork of the Powder, and before darkness fell, Wallace had seen faintly the outlines of the Bighorn Mountains away to the northwest, while northeastward he caught the familiar outlines of Pumpkin Buttes, which he remembered so well from his trip of the previous summer with Colonel Sawyer. The sight of the buttes brought him a pang as he thought of the grave of Nat Hedges, lying somewhere in the vast solitude beyond.

About three o'clock next morning, as they were mounting, Van Volzah said to Wallace, "We 're about sixteen miles from Reno, and we always try to take most of this stretch before daylight, because it 's a likely place for the Indians to jump us. We 're late starting to-day; we won't quite make it by dawn."

The locality seemed, in truth, a dangerous one, for the road ran down the valley of the Dry Fork, which was hemmed in by rough, rocky country on each side and was so narrow that in many places the track

lay in the very bed of the stream itself, which was dry at this season except for a pool here and there. The ledges of lignite and sandstone, which not only projected abruptly alongside the narrow basin but roughened the bed of it as well, made the footing hard for the horses, and they could seldom go faster than a rapid walk. Presently, after the party had been traveling for over two hours, a streak of gray appeared in the east and Major Bridger, noting it at once, said to Van Volzah, "I 'll ride a little piece ahead, son, an' watch fer the varmits. These boys o' yours better keep bunched more."

He urged his horse ahead and took the advance by a few yards, while Van Volzah cautioned the others to close up. The light had become strong enough to distinguish objects a hundred feet away, when Van Volzah silently held up his hand and drew in his horse. Ahead of him Bridger had done likewise and then dismounted. On the ground at his feet they could see the remains of a fire. In a moment the old man came back to them.

"Thar 's been some emigrants camped here," said he. "They 've left not half an hour ago. Thar war

five wagons strung out in the gully; nary a corral. An', top of it all, they built fires. It 's God's wonder they ever lived the night out."

"Fools for luck," muttered Van Volzah. "They 're some of these fellows that think the Laramie Treaty has made peace everywhere, and won't believe anything else."

The mail party pushed on in the broadening light and before long, on rounding a turn in the creek, saw five white-topped prairie schooners ahead of them. A lusty voice was trolling a song evidently picked up from some of the regular freighters of the road.

I 'm a lonely bull-whacker on the Red Cloud line,
I can lick any son of a gun that will yoke an ox of mine.
An' if I can catch him, you bet I will, or try,
I 'd lick him with an ox-bow—Root, hog, or die!

It 's out on the road these sights are to be seen,
The antelope an' buffalo, the prairie all so green—
The antelope an' buffalo, the rabbit jumps so high;
It 's whack the cattle on, boys—Root, hog, or die!

As they passed, Major Bridger, seeing that none of the drivers were carrying their guns or revolvers, called to them, "You bull-whackers better shet up

an' keep yer eyes peeled, I tell ye, or the Injins 'll hev yer scalps before ye git to Reno. This yere is a hornet's nest we 're in."

The leading driver laughed scornfully. "Say!" he cried. "We ain't no tenderfeet. I 've been in the Injin country in Nebrasky fer five years, an' I kin smell a buck a mile off. I don't smell none this mornin'."

"Yer smeller needs repairs, then," retorted Bridger, sharply. "I 've ben in the Injin country fer forty-four y'ars an' I smell 'em this mornin' plain as b'ar's grease on a sore neck. Ye mind what old Jim Bridger tells ye. That 's me."

Bridger's last admonition was delivered over his shoulder after passing the wagons. The bull-whacker did not reply, being evidently impressed, for the moment at least, by the name of the famous frontiersman. In a few moments the mail escort came to the end of the little cañon of the Dry Fork and found themselves suddenly descending into the wide valley of Powder River, which was dotted with large cottonwood trees, while bunches of grass began to appear among the sage brush and cactus, which for

miles back had been the only vegetation visible. A mile away on the opposite bank of the river stood the quadrangular stockade of Fort Reno, with its tapering blockhouses at three corners. In the distance it appeared rather small and frail, yet much more imposing to Wallace than it seemed the year before, when, as Fort Connor, he had found it only a cluster of hastily built log-cabins, standing wholly exposed on open ground, with no stockade or other defensive works around it.

The horses of Van Volzah's party broke into a trot on the open ground and had passed perhaps half-way across the bottom toward the ford below the fort, when a fusillade of rifle shots broke out behind them. Van Volzah involuntarily put out his hand and felt the fastenings of the heavy mail-sack across the front of his saddle, as they all turned to look back. They saw the five emigrant wagons, just issuing from the valley of Dry Fork, and a score or more of Indians charging down upon them from the hills on either side. Even at such a distance it was easy to see that several oxen had fallen at the first fire; that others, in terror, were trying

to break away; and that the wagons were stopped. Wallace pulled Sandy in sharply and instinctively turned to start back, but Major Bridger's hand caught his bridle rein.

"Come on," said the plainsman, imperatively. "Ye 're with the mail an' thet 's got to be seen safe into the fort. Thar 'll be soldiers out in a minute to help them fellers."

Van Volzah urged his horse to a gallop and the rest followed. It seemed as if hardly a moment had elapsed after the sound of the first shots before the great wooden gates of Fort Reno's stockade swung open and a column of mounted men poured out at the gallop, plunged across the ford, dashing the spray so high that Wallace could see it sparkle in the first rays of the rising sun, and then, scrambling up the southern bank, came racing toward them.

As they thundered past Van Volzah's party, each soldier with his long rifle in hand and his eyes fixed eagerly upon the distant Indians, the officer in command pulled up. "Ah, Major Bridger!" he exclaimed, pleased surprise in his voice. "What 's up back here?"

"Jest a bull train bein' pestered by the varmints, Cap'n Proctor," replied Bridger. "Ye better hurry up; thar 's only five wagons."

"Are you coming?" asked the Captain.

"Wall, bein' as the mail 's most in, I will," Bridger answered. Then he cast his eye upon Wallace. "Ye stay with Van, sonny," he said, sternly. "No use cavortin' after Sioux when ye don't hev to."

He and Captain Proctor, who was the commanding officer at Fort Reno, galloped swiftly after the column, while Wallace with the mail party rode on through the ford into the stockade and across the small parade ground to the stables, where the horses were unsaddled and led into stalls for a brief rest and a full feed. As soon as he had cared for Sandy, Wallace hurried back to the gates to see what was happening across the river. A number of infantry soldiers were gathered there, also attracted by curiosity. Beside the sentry in the watch tower of the nearest blockhouse stood an officer with his field glasses at his eyes.

"Are they still fighting over there?" asked Wallace of one of the soldiers.

"Don't think so; I guess the redskins have skedaddled," replied the man, in a matter-of-fact tone. "The boys seem to be comin' in with the wagons."

Wallace stepped from side to side in an effort to see across the river, but could make out little through the cottonwoods along the bank.

"Lieutenant Kirtland up there 's the only one can see much," remarked the soldier, nodding his head toward the officer in the lookout tower. "But there ain't much to see, anyhow. This sort of thing happens about every day."

"Does it?" asked Wallace, in surprise. "It must keep you fellows pretty busy."

"I guess it does!" answered the other with a chuckle. "There 's about all two companies can attend to around here."

"What are your companies?" Wallace inquired.

"B and F, Eighteenth Infantry," returned the soldier. "We 're all doughboys, but you 'd think we were cavalry, the way we have to chase around on

Late in the afternoon the party stopped for a few moments while the horses greedily quenched their thirst in the clear waters of Crazy Woman's Fork. As they were standing there, Van Volzah chanced to mention the fight which had occurred there in the previous July; and, discovering that Major Bridger had taken part in it, Wallace asked him concerning it.

"It war a nasty leetle fight," said the Major, twisting himself in his saddle and resting an elbow on one knee to rest. "As nasty as thar 's been in these parts. Thar war twenty-six in the outfit, two of 'em women, an' one o' them Mrs. Lieutenant Wands; she 's up to Kearney now. They had spunk a-plenty, too, them women did. Thar war five wagons an' two ambulanches goin' up from Laramie to Kearney, an' two or three hundred varmits caught 'em in the dry run we jest crossed back thar, but they got away an' corralled on top o' that hill." He pointed to a slight eminence a half-mile distant lying between Crazy Woman's Fork and the dry run referred to. "Lieutenant Daniels an' Lieutenant Templeton had rode ahead arter some buffalo; an' Daniels was

killed, but Templeton got back to the outfit alive, with an arrer in his back. Thar they laid a-top o' thet hill all arternoon, sizzlin' in the sun, with four wounded men groanin' fer water, till Chaplain White an' another feller went down to the creek with the varmints shootin' at 'em an' fetched water. White, now! Thar 's a preacher fer ye thet ain't a-feared o' goin' to heaven when guns is bangin'! Him an' Private Wallace along to'ard sunset took two horses an' made a run fer it an' got away on the road back to Reno fer help. Jest arter they left I come along in front o' Cap'n Burroughs an' two hundred soldiers from Kearney, goin' down to Reno fer supplies. I sez to Lieutenant Wands, 'I knowed thar was hell to pay today yere at Crazy Woman. I seen it from the kind o' signs the Injins had made on the buffalo skulls.'

"Them signs notified all Injins to be at Crazy Woman thet day becuz a battle war goin' to be fout thar, an' so I got Cap'n Burroughs to come on yere fer night camp, instid o' stoppin', like they gin'rally done, at Cl'ar Fork. The Cap'n laughed about the buffalo skulls an' 'lowed thar wan't no white people

at Crazy Woman crossin'; but he come on, anyhow, an' found thet old Jim Bridger war right."

He concluded with a dry chuckle as the mail party left the creek bed and, mounting the steep western bank, continued the journey.

Wallace's thoughts were gloomy as they rode along. The fact was being more forcibly impressed upon him every mile they advanced that this Bozeman Road was no safe place for small civilian trains, let alone for white women and children. He dejectedly speculated how he or his father was to conduct his mother and the children to their new home in Montana, and how the ten wagonloads of goods were to be transported across that four hundred and fifty miles of war-scourged country between Fort Laramie and Bozeman.

It was long after dark when they crossed the Clear Fork of the Powder, but still they pressed on through the night, anxious to reach their destination before daylight should reveal their presence to the watchful Indians on the hills around Fort Phil Kearney; and about three o'clock next morning, though for hours the exhausted horses had been stumbling in the dark-

ness and the men were so stiff and tired that they could hardly hold their saddles, their perseverance was rewarded. Major Bridger's keen eyes were the first to discover familiar proportions in the dim outlines of the hills after passing the dusky expanse of Lake DeSmet. "Thar 's Pilot Hill," he said in a low tone to Van Volzah. "When we git acrost Leetle Piney, I 'll ride ahead an' holler in front o' the main gates. We don't want to git shot at."

They waded the creek, then halted, and Bridger disappeared in the gloom. Presently they heard his voice upraised in a lusty shout which was very startling after the strained silence they had maintained for so long.

"Hey, thar, guard! Don't shoot! Yere 's Van Volzah an' Bridger with the mail."

"All right, Major," returned the voice of the sentry, reassuringly. "Advance and be recognized."

The whole party moved forward, and a bull's-eye lantern flashed upon them from the top of the stockade. Then there came the grating of keys in locks, the massive plank gates swung open before them, closed with a ponderous thump behind them as they

passed in, and Wallace found himself at one corner of the deserted parade ground of Fort Phil Kearney, safe for the time being and able at last to breathe freely the delicious night air wafted downward from the near-by summits of the Bighorns.

Van Volzah and Bridger turned their horses over to the soldiers of the escort and walked away across the parade ground with the mail sack, while Wallace accompanied the soldiers past some low log buildings into a long yard, which he could dimly see was bounded on one side by a stockade and on the other by log stables. Here Sandy and the tired horses of the escort were soon comfortably housed in stalls, and then Wallace and the men hurried across the parade ground to the barracks, where Wallace was to be made welcome to a vacant bunk. He was hardly able to keep awake long enough to throw off his clothes and crawl in between the grateful blankets, and his head had barely touched the pillow before he was wrapped in the profound slumber which comes only from utter weariness of body and mind.

CHAPTER XII

A SEPTEMBER DAY WITH RED CLOUD

HOW long he lay in his bunk, lost to all sense of thought and feeling, Wallace could not have told, but when he next opened his eyes he found himself gazing upward at a low ceiling of dressed logs. The daylight was so strong that he knew instinctively it must be very late in the morning, and his watch confirmed the impression; it was nearly eleven o'clock. Though the sounds of busy hammers, saws, and axes came distinctly through the window near his bunk, the long room was silent within and he thought it deserted until, on raising his head, he saw his six companions of the recent trip still sound asleep in adjacent bunks. The room was full of sleeping men when he came in the night before; now all were gone save these six, and Wallace's experienced eye took in the fact that the arm racks were empty also. He arose, dressed and quietly left the barrack.

As he closed the outer door, he paused to look at the scene spread before him in the brilliant September sunshine. From the direction of the sun it was evident that he stood at the northwestern end of a quadrangle about eight hundred feet long by six hundred feet wide. Along the end where he was, stretched four substantial log barracks, including the one in which he had slept, each built to accommodate one company of soldiers. At the northeastern side stood a row of several smaller buildings, and on the remaining two sides were yet others, some of them completed and some still under construction. It was around the latter that the many workmen were engaged whose tools Wallace had heard on awaking. The parade ground enclosed by the square of buildings was as yet nothing more than a bit of virgin prairie, though it had been neatly mowed and subdivided by two broad paths intersecting in the center. Near the southwestern corner of the parade stood four howitzers, three of them light mountain guns, the fourth a twelve-pounder field piece. They were drawn up in battery with their limbers behind them ready for use at a moment's notice. Beyond

them stood a large, square, two-story structure, still unfinished, which Wallace recognized as the headquarters building since it stood within the parade ground; and at the far end of the quadrangle were the stables, flanked by other smaller buildings. Entirely surrounding the post extended a blockade of massive logs set close together, and from where he stood Wallace could see what seemed to be an extension of the stockade, still uncompleted, surrounding other buildings outside the main fort to the southeast. Further on in this direction, across Little Piney Creek, loomed the high, round top of Pilot Hill; and on every other side, though at greater distances from the fort, peaks, ridges, and buttes stretched away to the horizon; those to the southwest, however, far overtopped any of the others as they rose in majestic ranges to the snow-capped summits of the Bighorns, dominated in the distance by imperial Cloud Peak.

The fort itself stood on high ground, sloping downward in every direction to the adjacent creeks and commanding a good view of the surrounding country. With a thrill of pleasure Wallace recog-

nized this as the very region he had looked upon with such delight one afternoon in the previous year, when Colonel Sawyer's train camped on the Big Piney, at hardly a rifleshot's distance from the present sight of Fort Phil Kearney.

Having taken his bearings, Wallace walked down past the howitzers and along the row of buildings behind them toward the unfinished post headquarters; he wished to find, if possible, among all the busy soldiers, every one of whom seemed to be working with the utmost energy, some individual with time enough to spare to tell him when he might expect to be able to continue his journey toward Bozeman in company with a party going in that direction. He readily guessed that the buildings behind the howitzers were the officers' quarters. Several tents were still standing among them; and as he walked along he was startled to come face to face with two ladies, just issuing from one of the tents. They were dressed in the full fashion of the day, with immense hoop skirts, silk dresses, and velvet jackets embroidered in broad, elaborate designs, and tiny hats behind which streamed long veils. For a mo-

ment Wallace almost wondered whether he was really in Fort Phil Kearney, the most isolated army post of the Northwest, or on Fifth Street, in the fashionable shopping district of St. Louis. The ladies passed him with well-bred glances of curiosity, for strangers were few in that place, and Wallace walked on toward headquarters, feeling oddly refreshed by the sight of them.

In the midst of a dozen busy workmen he found Major Bridger, sitting on a log beside the new building with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands intently studying the long range of hills north of the fort, beyond the Big Piney.

"Good morning, Major," said Wallace. "How long have you been up?"

"Sence sunup," returned the veteran, raising his head as if startled from deep thought. "I 'm used to losin' sleep."

"Well, I thought I was," returned Wallace, looking at the rugged old man admiringly, "but that ride tired me clear out. Have you any idea when I 'll be able to go on toward Bozeman?"

"Wall, I can't say," Bridger returned, "but not

to-day, fer sartin. The varmints is everywhar to-day, an' special up thar along the Virginy City Road." He nodded toward the northward hills.

Wallace looked for a moment in the direction indicated. Finally he said: "Are they signaling, Major? I can't see them."

"Wait long enough an' ye 'll ketch th'ar lookin' glasses flashin'," Bridger answered. "They 're on Lodge Trail Ridge, thet nearest rise over thar, an' on the hills along Peno Creek, further on." He stopped and looked around, then continued. "Yere comes Lieutenant Wands. Mebbe he kin tell ye more about goin' on to Bozeman."

Wallace turned and saw approaching them an officer who greeted Bridger warmly and then said, in answer to Wallace's question: "I can give you no information about that. The General has said nothing to me yet of when he intends forwarding the mail to Fort C. F. Smith. But I will take you in to see him."

Accordingly he conducted Wallace into the unfinished building, past piles of boards and dimension timbers, to a room which had been completed in ad-

vance of the rest of the structure. Within, at a table covered with building plans, papers, and drawing instruments, sat General Carrington, hard at work on the innumerable structural details of the fort, which, as Wallace soon learned, was being erected entirely under his personal supervision and in accordance with plans all worked out by himself.

He gave Wallace a kindly greeting, and when the latter had explained his errand, the General said: "I 'm afraid you will have to wait here for several days, my boy. We are unusually busy just now trying to finish the stockade, and I shall have to use every man for at least three days either in the building squads, with the lumbering parties at Piney Island, or on guard duty. The soldiers you came in with from Fort Laramie will be on duty this afternoon, as soon as they have had their sleep out. Probably about four days from now I can spare enough men to escort the mail to Fort C. F. Smith; and you will have to wait here meanwhile—unless, by chance, Captain Kinney, in command there, should send a party down here for some purpose."

Wallace was disappointed over the delay, but, as

it could not be avoided, he proceeded to make the best of the situation. Being by no means of a disposition to sit idle where everyone else was working, he asked permission of the General to assist the men who were erecting the headquarters building, in order, as he expressed it, to help earn his board. His request was readily granted; in fact, his willingness and energy so pleased the General that he soon became a favorite with him, a fact which stood him in good stead later on.

So two days passed. Though he did not leave the fort during that time except to go after lumber with other men of the building squads to the two steam sawmills on Little Piney Creek just south of the stockade, Wallace learned the geography of the surrounding country quite thoroughly from the conversation of his comrades. He learned that Piney Island, or as it was usually called, "The Pinery," whence a long train of wagons came back to the fort daily, laden with logs, was located seven miles to the west, at the base of the Bighorn Range, between two channels of Big Piney Creek. The road to the Pinery lay along the southern slope of Sullivant

Hills, a long, barren ridge which began immediately west of the fort, and he learned that on top of this hill and on Pilot Hill pickets were always stationed to signal the approach of Indians, or of parties of white men from either direction along the Bozeman Road. It seemed that a favorite maneuver of the Indians was to sweep down from the rough hills to the north, along Peno Creek, through the valley of the Big Piney between Sullivant Hills and Peno Head, west of it, and attack either the lumbering parties at work on Piney Island or the wood train as it passed back and forth between the island and the fort. Their attempted surprises were often brought to naught by the picket on Sullivant Hills, who could see both the fort and the pinery and with his flag could signal his observations to either point. Similarly, the lookout on Pilot Hill could see the Bozeman Road for many miles beyond Lake DeSmet toward Fort Reno and for many miles in the other direction, where it followed the valley of Peno Creek, and could signal to the fort if trains or other parties of travelers within his range of vision were in need of help against Indian attacks.

On the third day of Wallace's stay in the fort, he was up before daybreak, as usual, with the soldiers. The morning was magnificently clear, a tang of frost sharpened the air, and on going out of the barracks Wallace was surprised and a bit dismayed to find that a slight snow had fallen during the night, and the ground was white. Everyone sprang to his work with energy, for this suggestion of coming winter brought a keen realization of the fact that the fort was still far from finished and that only unceasing labor could make it complete before the days of bitter cold. The timber train got off early for the Pinery, and a party went down to the Big Piney below the fort after water. The usual details were working on the buildings and on the extension of the stockade, digging the ditch and setting the upright logs in it, and from the mills on the creek came the rasping screech of the saws.

About ten o'clock guard mount took place on the parade ground, conducted with all the ceremony prescribed by regulations, for, in spite of the fact that the scarcely three hundred and fifty soldiers and civilians in the post were all too constantly busy to

permit of any other sort of display at any time, the General insisted on maintaining this one feature of correct military discipline. The band was just marching away from guard parade and members of the old guard were already hard at work on the uncompleted company barracks, when a sentry on the platform at one corner of the stockade suddenly flung his musket to his shoulder and fired, at the same instant shouting: "Indians!"

Wallace, who was industriously wielding an ax, turned in the direction toward which all others were looking and saw a party of seven mounted warriors dash out of the thick cottonwoods at the junction of the Big and Little Pineys, east of the fort, and gallop furiously toward the picket post on Pilot Hill. Wallace's heart leaped into his throat. He dropped his ax and started toward the stables on the run with the intention of saddling Sandy. But before he had even reached them, the relief of the picket, whose horses always stood saddled and ready, came tearing out of the cavalry yard and through the main gates, which had been swung open for them. Being too late to join them, Wallace stopped and with tense

nerves watched the race, which was exciting enough for a moment. But it soon became evident that the Indians had too much of a start for the relief to reach the picket in time.

"Good Heaven!" thought Wallace. "What can be done? Those poor fellows will be massacred right in our sight!"

But as he turned to see if any further effort was to be made to save the endangered picket, he discovered that the gun detachments were in their places at the howitzers and just as he looked, the officer in command cried: "Number one, ready! Aim! Fire!"

The howitzer was loaded with a stand of canister containing eighty bullets and it sped accurately toward its mark and exploded directly over the heads of the warriors, scattering dirt and bullets in every direction. On previous occasions the Indians had tasted the destruction dealt by "the guns that shoot twice," as they called the howitzers, and when the deadly messenger reached them now they slackened speed abruptly and turned back for the brush.

"Good work!" cried Wallace to a soldier who had

come up beside him, clenching his fists with excitement. "That 's too much for 'em. But, oh, if the boys could only give 'em another! What a target they are now."

The words had not left his lips before another howitzer roared. Its shot spun through the air, burst and one of the warriors pitched from his pony but was quickly caught up between two of his companions and borne into the brush before another shot could be fired. Nevertheless the spectators in the fort cheered the gunner who had made the successful shot, and then, the incident apparently being closed, resumed their interrupted tasks. Wallace had just noticed that among the intent observers of the Indian foray were several women and children in front of the officers' quarters and a still larger number around the barracks occupied by the band musicians and their families, when several shots rang out directly across the Big Piney to the northeast and, simultaneously, the sentry at the northwest corner of the stockade gave the alarm that a strong party of hostiles was coming down the Little Piney toward the sawmills. The attack on two

sides of the fort at once was confusing but a squad of infantry was quickly going through the mill gates toward the sawmills on the double quick, covered by the fire of a howitzer, while another of the little guns was turned across the Big Piney upon a much larger force of Indians, probably fifty in number, who were sweeping down upon the horse herd of a party of civilian miners who, under a Captain Bailey, were encamped about seven hundred yards from the fort on the opposite side of the creek.

And now, as if to complete the embarrassment of the little garrison, while the two attacks were in full progress close to the stockade, there suddenly appeared on the distant summit and slopes of Lodge Trail Ridge a mass of several hundred Indians galloping furiously down toward the Pinery and the road leading to it from the fort. Red Cloud's plans were rapidly developing and they assuredly showed the shrewd tactical skill of a born general. By the demonstrations near the fort he meant to keep the garrison busy there while with his main body he endeavored to overwhelm the lumbering and wood train detachments at Piney Island.

Inside the stockade all was apparently in confusion, but it was the confusion of many orders being executed at once, not of panic. Bugle calls succeeded each other rapidly, men ran hither and thither joining their details, officers shouted and the howitzers boomed, while over at Captain Bailey's camp the feverish pop, pop, of rifles and revolvers told how stoutly the miners were defending their herd.

The near-by struggle was at its height when Wallace, quite beside himself with excitement, came running from the barracks with his weapons, rushed into the stables, saddled Sandy and rode out again in time to join a detachment of thirty mounted men under Lieutenant Wands just as they were trotting through the mill gates on their way to the relief of the Pinery. There was little time or inclination for talk as Wallace took his place beside the mounted infantrymen and, trotting and galloping but generally keeping the faster pace, they hurried on along the base of Sullivant Hills. The Indians over toward Lodge Trail Ridge were no longer in sight, being hidden behind the hills, and though the men anxiously watched the picket on the summit, the lat-

ter seemed unable to signal any information of the whereabouts of the enemy. As they went on, gradually the sounds of the battle around the fort died away behind them and in less than an hour they rode down a steep slope, splashed through a ford and entered the heavy pine timber of the island, lying almost under two towering spurs of the Bighorn Range, Peno Head and Rocky Face Ridge.

The noise of the horses' hoofs, so sharp and distinct on the hard prairie road they had been following, now became muffled in a soft carpet of pine needles as they rapidly made their way through the dim, fragrant aisles of noble trees, until Wallace saw before them a clearing containing a square blockhouse of massive logs, loopholed and formidable in appearance. A number of soldiers were around it, all armed and evidently ready for instant battle, though they had stepped out into the clearing on seeing Lieutenant Wands's detachment approaching. As the latter halted, the sergeant in command of the permanent garrison of the blockhouse, came forward and saluted. Leaning forward in his sad-

dle, Lieutenant Wands asked quickly: "Have you been attacked here, Sergeant?"

"No, sir," returned the other, "not in force, but the woods are full of redskins." He turned partly toward Assistant Surgeon Reid, who had come out with Lieutenant Wands, and continued: "Private Patrick Smith is here in the blockhouse wounded. He 's still alive but he 's in a bad way, scalped and shot full of arrows. He was going down to the lumbering party and was near half a mile away when the redskins got him but he managed to break off the arrow shafts and crawl in here a little while ago."

The doctor dismounted and hurried into the blockhouse, while the Sergeant continued, addressing Lieutenant Wands: "The working party is cutting about a mile down the island, sir. We 've heard them shooting; there must be Indians down there too."

"I 'll ride down and clear the woods," returned the Lieutenant. "I 'm glad there has been no serious attack. Lodge Trail Ridge was covered with Indians demonstrating this way when we started.

They may have seen us and given it up. But keep on guard, Sergeant, every minute."

So saying, he turned to his men and commanded: "Forward, march!"

The column, turning to the right, moved away through the woods northward in the direction of the gap between Peno Head and Sullivant's Hills. Presently the ringing of axes greeted their ears, and then the thunderous crash of a falling tree. A moment later they emerged into a big opening in the woods, denuded of large timber and covered with stumps and slashed branches. They crossed the clearing and came to the working party on the farther side. The wagons of the timber train were corralled in the edge of the clearing, the mules inside. The sergeant in command here was just coming from the woods to the corral as Lieutenant Wands approached him and asked: "Have you been attacked?"

"No, sir," was the reply, "except that five or six bucks seem to be sneakin' around in the woods, sharpshootin'. I 've put some o' the teamsters on chain guard to protect the axmen, but I dassent

send 'em far enough to chase the redskins clear out.''

Lieutenant Wands dismounted his detachment and, leaving the horses under a guard of ten men beside the corral, formed a skirmish line of the rest and entered the woods. Wallace accompanied the skirmishers, who regarded him as a very important addition to their force, with his Henry rifle and up-to-date Colt's revolver, both so vastly superior to the clumsy, single-shot, muzzle-loading Springfield muskets of the soldiers. He himself fully appreciated the advantages of his equipment and pushed into the timber boldly on the extreme left flank of the line, getting a little in advance in his eagerness, though he, as well as the rest, moved forward very quietly in order if possible to surprise any hostiles who might be prowling about. As the skirmishers came up, the teamsters dissolved their chain guard and withdrew toward the corral.

In moving forward, carefully scanning the ground in front of him but paying little heed to the fact that he was several rods ahead of the remainder of the line, Wallace quickly came to a patch of under-

brush on the other side of which he heard the sound of axes. Naturally judging that he must still be within the area over which the lumbermen were working, he picked his way through the thicket, taking perhaps a minute in doing so and noticing, though without curiosity, that meanwhile the sound of the axes in front of him suddenly ceased. But as he came to the edge of the open woods beyond the bushes, he stopped short with an inarticulate gasp of horror. Not a hundred feet ahead of him two soldiers lay quivering on the ground, their axes still clutched in their outstretched hands and five or six arrows sticking in the body of each one. Four naked, moccasined Indians were running toward them as silently as shadows, their faces contorted with hideous glee in anticipation of the scalps they were to secure from their victims.

Wallace, by great good fortune, had not stepped into view but had caught the dreadful scene through a rift in the bushes. Now, with a cold fury in his heart which seemed to steady his nerves to the hardness of steel, he dropped to his knee and threw his rifle to his shoulder. The shot cracked out through

the silent woods like the snap of a falling tree, sharper though less loud than the report of a musket. But almost before it could be heard it was followed by another and another and another, a perfect stream. Wallace had never fired his rifle so fast before, certainly never with such deadly effect. He was far from being of a bloodthirsty disposition; ordinarily the sight of a dead or wounded Indian was almost as distressing to him as the sight of a white man in a similar condition, while in his calm moments he was perfectly frank to admit that the Indians were amply justified in their struggle to drive the white invaders from their ancestral territory. But at this moment, with the two stricken soldiers, who had been alive and active only a few seconds before, lying in their blood before him, his only thought was for swift and terrible vengeance, coupled with a sense of the fact that by some strange providence he had been made the instrument of this vengeance. So it was that, when from his cover his rifle had stretched three of the Indians on the ground while the fourth, terror-stricken, had fled from the hail of bullets, he continued to pump

shots into the bodies of the fallen warriors until a hand was laid on his shoulder and a voice cried in his ear: "Quit it, Smith, quit it! You 're just wasting ammunition. You 've hit every one of those fellows three or four times."

Wallace looked up with dazed eyes into the face of Lieutenant Wands. He had hardly realized what he had been doing but now that it was over he felt weak and sick. Slowly he lowered his rifle and in a mechanical way opened the nearly empty magazine and reloaded it from his belt. Half-a-dozen of the skirmishers had gathered around him, while the rest were kneeling over the dead wood choppers and Indians out in front. In the faces of the men around Wallace was an admiration akin to awe, for such shooting was little less than marvelous.

"That was splendid work, Smith," said Lieutenant Wands. "I never saw the like of it. I congratulate you."

"Don't!" said Wallace, huskily, speaking for the first time and pressing his hand against his eyes. "Please don't. It 's no credit to me. I shot from a blind; the Indians had n't a chance. I never killed

a man before to my knowledge. Perhaps, in the war, but I did n't know it. It 's awful. My head aches. Let me go back."

The soldiers looked at him in astonishment.

"Phat are yez talkin' about?" cried a corporal, gruffly. "Awful, is it, to kill thim rid-handed murtherers, thim painted divils phat jist done our poor bunkies to dith? Sorra, but it 's me would be right glad to carry the job on my conscience fer yez!"

"Oh, yes, Corporal; you 're right, no doubt," Wallace answered. "I 'll get used to it, too, after a while, I suppose. But it hurts now. I can't reason about it. Here, take my rifle if you want, Corporal, and give me your musket. I 'm going back to the horses. My head 's splitting."

"Go on, lad," said Lieutenant Wands, kindly. "I don't blame you. This man-hunting is awful, and you have n't seen enough of the horror of it around this fort to be as used to it as we are. Lie down under one of the wagons and get your stomach back."

Wallace followed his advice, and in half an hour, when the troops returned from a fruitless reconnois-

sance of the woods, he was himself again, though the terrible impression wrought upon his mind by the experience of that day never grew dim. While the detachment had been scouring the woods the bodies of the two unfortunate axmen had been carried to one of the wagons; and when the mounted party left, this wagon left with it. At the blockhouse the wounded man, Patrick Smith, who was unconscious, and whose death (so Dr. Reid said) would only be a question of a few hours, was also placed in the wagon, which then hastened to the fort under escort of Lieutenant Wands' men.

The troops and the wagon passed through the mill gates once more a little after one o'clock, and while the men were putting up their horses they learned from the stable guard that the morning attack on the sawmills had been easily repulsed; while Captain Bailey's miners, aided by the fire of the howitzer, had saved their horse herd entire and had killed at least one pony of the Indians. Lieutenant Wands' men were hungry after their swift ride and the scouting through the woods of Piney Island, and they hurried away eagerly to their belated noonday mess. They

were just finishing it about two o'clock when the whistle of the farther sawmill began to blow in short, agonizing shrieks, followed immediately by several picket shots.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed the soldier next to Wallace at table, as with a clatter of benches the men, many of them still eating, sprang to their feet and hurried out. "That Red Cloud 'll get me out o' patience pretty soon. The idee, not even lettin' fellers finish eatin'!"

What the men saw on gaining the open air was a party of a dozen or fifteen Indians galloping at the top of their ponies' speed along the other side of the Little Piney toward the picket post on Pilot Hill. Coming from the opposite direction to that they had followed in the morning attack, they were already between the picket and the fort. Down at the stables the picket relief and a number of additional men were mounting their horses in the yard, while Captain Brown and Lieutenant Adair, the post adjutant, were running toward the stables from the officers' quarters.

"By George!" exclaimed Wallace, in dismay,

comprehending the situation at a glance. "The howitzers can't fire now without danger of hitting the picket. What can they do?"

"I don't know," answered the soldier; "but there 's four men up there and Private Rover 's in charge. He 's got plenty o' nerve."

As the mounted relief swept out through the main gates the Indians were ascending the slope of Pilot Hill in long leaps.

"Look there!" cried Wallace's companion, excitedly. "Ain't that great? Rover 'll save his horses, anyhow."

The men around the barrack door laughed delightedly as they saw the four horses of the picket, turned loose by their masters with an urgent start, come tearing down the steep hillside toward the fort. The whole scene lay spread before the watchers as plainly as if set upon the stage of a theater, though the real peril of the present situation lent it a breathless interest far exceeding anything the mimic stage could ever present. The attitudes of the spectators showed this plainly; the women in front of officers' row standing with hands pressed to their cheeks,

men on tiptoe or crouching with clenched fists and others with their hats crushed in their hands, their lips drawn back and teeth ground together.

"Gee, look at 'em come!" exclaimed Wallace's companion, speaking like a man in a dream as he stood first upon one foot and then on the other in his nervous excitement. "Bet yeh a dollar the Injins can't stop 'em. By jinks, they ain't a-goin' to even try! They 're afraid to. Look a' that; shootin' arrows at 'em! Thunder! They hit one. No, they did n't; no, they did n't! He 's comin', too. *What* d' ye think o' that? They 're all through, safe! They 'll come in now, all right. What in tunket 's Rover tryin' to do? See 'em up there, backin' off down the north slope? Oh, I savvy; they 're aimin' to join the relief. Whoop-ee! They 'll make it, too. There 's Brown an' Adair, halfway up an' runnin' like whiteheads. Lawzee, them horses must have claws, the way they climb. Say, but it 's lucky Rover fell back; there 's the Injuns, clear up on top. Aw, shucks, don't they think they 're smart, jest because they 've got that empty picket post? Look a' that old baboon ridin' his pony in a circle, same as

the picket does fer the alarm signal. I s'pose he thinks that 'll rile us down here. Oh, would n't that be a shot fer the howitzers now if they could only give 'em one 'by battery, fire!' Shucks! There they go. I thought they 'd duck lively when the mounted boys got up that close. Aw, ye blamed cottontails, wait a minute an' give the boys a chance to paste ye one; jest one! Thunder! Over the hill with ye, then, but mebbe they 'll ketch ye, anyhow, an' give ye what ye deserve!"

The Indians had fled down the eastern slope of the hill toward Lake DeSmet, hotly pursued by Brown and Adair, who with their men streamed over the crest after the fugitives and disappeared, while the people in the fort resumed their work, speculating anxiously upon the outcome of the chase. It was nearly dark when the pursuers at last returned, their horses lathered and weary. But, as usual, the wily foe had eluded them and escaped with little loss in the fastnesses of the surrounding wilderness.

CHAPTER XIII

A JOURNEY IN HASTE

IT was just after supper time when Private Sample, the headquarters' orderly, came into the barracks looking for Wallace. The latter was at the far side of the room, riving shingles from solid blocks of pine with the rest of the men, who often spent their evenings in such "shingle bees" in order to hasten work. The orderly soon found him, however, and said, with stiff formality: "Compliments of the District Commander, sir, and he wishes to see you at his quarters."

Wallace arose and followed Sample to the large hospital tent in officers' row, where General Carrington and his family were still living, pending the completion of the rooms in the headquarters building which they were soon to occupy. As he entered, Wallace was struck by the cosy, homelike appearance of the canvas home, so evidently the result of

the presence of women. A carpet covered the floor, some pictures adorned the low, vertical portions of the walls, comfortable camp-chairs and rockers were scattered about, a cheery fire burned in the sheet-iron heating stove near the center-pole, and close by it, surrounding a library table which was covered with books and magazines, sat General and Mrs. Carrington and a young lady whom Wallace knew by sight to be the wife of Lieutenant Grummond. Three boys were sprawling on the floor playing some sort of game; Harry and Jimmie Carrington and Bobbie Wands. The ladies were sewing, and the General was absorbed in a book which Wallace, prompted by curiosity, managed to discover during the course of his interview was a copy of the "Persians," by Æschylus, in the original Greek. As Wallace came in, the General laid the volume down after marking the place, then arose and greeted him and with grave courtesy introduced him to the ladies. Then, resuming his seat, he said:

"I shall start a small party to Fort C. F. Smith at ten o'clock to-night, Mr. Smith. I called you in to notify you personally because I feel that it will be a

dangerous trip just at present, with the Indians as numerous and alert around this post as they have shown themselves to be today. I can spare only ten men to go with Bailey, who will carry the mail, and you may go with them or not, as you like. If you prefer you can wait a few days for Captain Kinney, who I think will soon be down after supplies, with a strong party. You are certainly making yourself sufficiently useful here to earn your rations," he smiled. "Moreover, I understand from Major Bridger that you have left your mother and young brother and sister at Fort Laramie with a train. For their sakes I would not wish you to take any unwarranted risks. What do you say?"

Wallace thought for a moment. Finally he replied: "I thank you for your thoughtfulness, General, but I really believe I should go on tonight. I am very anxious to reach Bozeman and see my father, and I believe that ten men of the Eighteenth Infantry will be able to get through all right. Don't you, sir?"

"I certainly do," answered the General, emphatically. "I would not send them otherwise.

But, nevertheless, we are to realize that there is a large element of risk."

"What do you think your mother would say about it, Mr. Smith?" asked Mrs. Carrington, looking up at him seriously. As she spoke he noticed her kindly eyes and sensitive mouth and the simple, becoming way in which her hair was arranged, drawn straight down from her high forehead hiding her ears.

"Well, that 's a hard question, Mrs. Carrington," Wallace answered, frankly. "She approved of my starting out from Fort Laramie, but, of course, she did n't know how dangerous the road was; I did n't myself, then. But, anyway, I 've been through a lot of campaigning and mother has a good deal of confidence in my ability to take care of myself."

Young Mrs. Grummond sighed. "That is what men always seem to think," she said, half sadly, "whether they are sons or fathers or husbands. If a woman swallows her fears for them and says nothing, then she has 'confidence in their ability to take care of themselves.' Still, if men did n't feel that way I suppose they never would enjoy doing any-

thing, because the women who care always fear for them.''

A few moments more of conversation followed, which Wallace long remembered with pleasure, and then he left to make ready for the journey on which he had fully decided, leaving the General, whose leisure moments were few and infrequent, once more absorbed in Æschylus.

At ten o'clock promptly the mail escort started out through the main gates, General Carrington himself being there to see them off. The gates were opened carefully, to avoid noise, and as silently closed behind them, though the wind was blowing hard enough to drown ordinary sounds at a short distance. The soldiers and the mail-carrier knew the road well and followed it through the darkness unerringly. For a number of miles they went slowly in order to give the Indians no alarm by the clatter of trotting or galloping hoofs and they followed closely along the bases of the hills where they were less likely to be observed than they would be on higher ground. Thus they skirted the northeastern base of Lodge Trail Ridge, struck the head of Peno

Creek and followed down its valley, crossing it several times. All the while they well knew that on the hills about them were sleeping or watchful Indians who would be down upon them in hundreds if they should chance to be discovered. Finally, breathing a little easier, they passed over the divide into the valley of Goose Creek, where Crary and Carter, the hay contractors, had cut hay for Fort Phil Kearney during a part of the summer until driven away by the Indians.

Feeling reasonably confident now that they had passed through the most dangerous zone of territory adjacent to the fort, they increased their pace and at daybreak were at Grass Lodge Creek, about fifty miles from Kearney and forty from their destination. Concealing themselves in the heaviest timber they could find near the road, they passed the day in hiding, keeping the horses close and feeding them only with oats which had been brought along. Several times during the day the guards saw parties of Indians on the neighboring hills watching the road or passing along on the march, and once they distinctly heard distant firing.

Soon after nightfall they started on again and beyond Rotten Grass Creek, a tributary of the Big-horn, stumbled so unexpectedly upon a large wagon train corralled beside the road that the pickets of the emigrants fired before Bailey and his men could make themselves known. Fortunately no one was hit and the soldiers soon learned that the firing they had heard in the afternoon had come from this train, which had been attacked while in column and one man wounded and several head of oxen run off before corral could be formed at the spot where the wagons were still lying. The train had passed Fort Phil Kearney the day before Wallace reached there and had been several times attacked but had succeeded in making progress, though only at the rate of about ten miles per day. The mail party halted for but a few moments at the corralled train, then becoming satisfied that the firing of the pickets had not aroused any Indians hovering in that vicinity, it went on. Within ten miles of Fort Smith the pace again slowed to a walk, and it was after four o'clock when they approached the gates and called for admittance.

Wallace found Fort Smith to be a substantial stockaded post, though much smaller than Fort Kearney. It was about as far advanced toward completion as the latter; for, in proportion to the magnitude of the work, its garrison of two companies of the Eighteenth Infantry had as much labor to perform as the four companies at Fort Kearney, while the embarrassments caused by Indian attacks were almost as serious as at the larger post. Close by the fort in the fertile valley of the Bighorn River a wagon train loaded with mining machinery was corralled. A foolish attempt had been made to take it through with coupled wagons so as to reduce the number of drivers, and the lack of men had nearly caused the destruction of the train. On the previous day it had been rescued from Indians several miles down the road by a detachment from the fort. The machinery belonged to a joint company of miners near Virginia City; and Wallace was delighted to find that four men from the train were about to start for that point after a strong party of the miners interested to come down and escort the wagons

to their destination. He joined the messengers and went on.

That day they reached Pryor's Fork, where they camped for the night, and next morning pushed ahead as rapidly as their horses could travel, risking the danger of encountering Indians, which, however, was now much less than on the east side of the Big-horn River. The remainder of the journey was safely accomplished, and shortly before noon on the third day out from Fort Smith, Wallace dismounted in front of the store of Samuel Smith and Son in Bozeman, hitched his horse, and entered with rapid steps.

The first person he saw was an individual near the door with his head and body swallowed up in the interior of a large barrel, evidently empty or nearly so. But Wallace recognized the feet and legs and the temptation of the situation was too strong for him to resist. He seized the legs and lifted them high in the air. A violent kicking ensued and a voice from the bottom of the barrel shouted, in sepulchral tones:

"Hey, leggo me! What ahe you-all tryin' to do? I 'll dump yo' into the Gallatin when I get yo'!"

Wallace, laughing, let his victim down; and from the barrel emerged the flushed, indignant face of Vance Lytle, who, as he caught sight of his tormentor, expressed first blank astonishment and then delighted welcome.

"Wallace!" he exclaimed, forgetting his righteous indignation in an instant as he grasped the traveler's hand. "Wheh in Sam Hill did yo' drop f'om?"

"Fort Laramie," returned Wallace. "Only I did n't drop, Vance. I climbed."

"Is yo' train out heah—an' yo' folks?" inquired Vance, stepping back and peering out of the front door.

"Goodness, no!" Wallace exclaimed, regretfully. "I wish they were, but they 're back at Laramie. I could n't bring them through, the Indians are so bad, so I came on by myself to get help. Where 's father?"

"He 's oveh at the house, eatin' dinneh."

"House?" asked Wallace, surprised in his turn. "Are n't you still living upstairs here?"

"Not by a long shot," grinned Vance. "We-all have a palatial residence now, on the latest improved ahchitectuhal model. Also, we have a cook."

"A cook?" Wallace cried, more and more astonished.

"Yes, seh. No mo' bacheloh's hall fo' us. Things have been movin' in Bozeman, Wallace, since you went away. But go up an' see fo' yo'self; I got to mind the stohe till yo' fatheh gets back. The house is two blocks up the street, no'thwest cohneh. It 's got green window-shades, an' it 's plumb in the heaht o' the exclusive residence district." He walked to the door, his hand on Wallace's shoulder. "Hurry back, soon as yo' can," he continued. "I 'm mighty anxious to heah about yo' adventu'es, an' I 'm awful sorry if yo 've had trouble."

"Trouble a-plenty, Vance," Wallace returned as he mounted Sandy. "You 'll know all about it soon enough, but now I must see father right away."

He turned and hastened up the street. It was

not hard to recognize the new house as he approached. A delightful surprise it was, indeed, which Mr. Smith had prepared for his family. The house was a substantial, square, two-story frame structure, of apparently about eight rooms. It was nicely painted, and both in size and appearance was superior to almost any other house in town, though Wallace noted with both pleasure and surprise how many new buildings had gone up since he had left Bozeman the first of June.

As Vance had given him to expect, he found his father at the dinner table, and Dr. Mahan was with him. Mr. Smith's amazement over Wallace's wholly unexpected appearance was even greater than that of Vance, and an hour's time hardly sufficed Wallace for explaining all the reasons which had prompted him to leave the family and the train at Fort Laramie, and for detailing the experiences of his hurried trip over the Bozeman Road. But when he had concluded, Mr. Smith was full of praise for his son's wisdom. Indeed, it seemed that, having learned from emigrants who had come through of the serious Indian hostilities along the road, Mr. Smith had

warned Wallace to act cautiously in several letters; none of which had been delivered owing to Wallace's movements from place to place. Mr. Smith, however, had received the letters from his wife and from Wallace, written at Omaha, informing him of the vexatious delay there and, foreseeing how late in the fall, in any case, the train would reach Bozeman, he had freighted some goods down from Fort Benton. The new house, which he had begun building almost immediately after his son's departure for the East, was still almost bare of furnishings, waiting for the household goods from St. Paul. The cook, a Chinaman from the Pacific coast who had drifted into Bozeman during the summer, was a luxury indulged in by Dr. Mahan.

The question of what was to be done about the family and the train was most difficult. The Smiths discussed it all the remainder of that day and evening, aided by Dr. Mahan and Vance, and then slept over it. But the following morning Mr. Smith came to a decision which he voiced as follows to Wallace:

"You and Vance will have to bring the train through, my boy. You are perfectly familiar with

the situation, and Vance is eager to go with you and help you. It would do no good for me to go; moreover, someone must stay at the store, and I 'm the logical one to do it. You can get safely to Fort Smith with this large party of miners which you say is going from Virginia City to bring up their train of machinery. They will probably be here in a day or two on their way down. From Fort Smith you can get to Fort Laramie as you came up, with the mail escorts or other military detachments that are passing back and forth. You must not leave Laramie until you can do so with a large number of other wagons; not less than a hundred, if you can help it; certainly not less than fifty, and the men with them all well armed. Besides that, however many wagons and people there are in the train, you must not attempt to bring mother and the children along unless you find on the way down that conditions along the road have vastly improved over what they were when you came up. Mother can still get around here by stage through Fort Bridger before the traveling becomes too bad, and that will be the best thing for her to do in case you conclude the Boze-

man Road is too dangerous. I will give you money for mother to make the journey with by stage, so that she will be sure to have enough, if that is what you decide upon."

Wallace and Vance accordingly began immediate preparations to start back to Fort Smith with the party of miners whenever the latter should come through Bozeman. Vance, who was delighted at the prospect of a trip from which many would have shrunk with dread, was equipped by his employer with a Henry rifle and a Colt's revolver like those carried by Wallace, and he was to use the latter's riding-horse, Wallace preferring to continue riding Sandy, to whose gaits and habits he was now accustomed.

It was well that the boys did not delay in making ready, for that very evening the miners, twenty-one in number and heavily armed, came into Bozeman intending to camp near the town that night and be off again by dawn next morning. They were in a great hurry, both because of their anxiety to secure their machinery and have it installed and working before the depth of winter, and also because they

did not want to spend any more time than was absolutely necessary away from their claims. They welcomed the addition of two more well-equipped members to their party, and the boys immediately left with them for the place where they intended to make night camp on the East Gallatin, a short distance out of town.

As Wallace stopped beside his horse to bid goodby to his father before galloping after the rest of the party, who were riding on, Vance with them, Mr. Smith repeated his cautions and injunctions and concluded by saying: "I don't need to tell you, lad, that you can depend absolutely on Vance in any emergency. You have been with him enough to know that as well as I. But he is developing rapidly in judgment and the power to handle responsibility. In fact, I don't know what I should have done without him this summer, when you were not here to fall back upon. You know he is studying law with George Featherston, and George says his intelligence and the rapidity of his progress are remarkable. However, enough of this. You must be off; and I simply want to say that Vance thinks the

world of you, and I believe you two boys are a combination hard to beat, and I have every confidence you will bring yourselves and your train through safely. But always stay on the safe side of every danger whenever you possibly can, Wallace, and, above all, take good care of mother and the children. Good-by, my boy, and God bless you!"

"If all goes well, father, we shall be back within five weeks," replied Wallace. "And we will do our best to make things go well. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XIV

FLAG DAY AT FORT PHIL KEARNEY

THE journey to Fort Smith was merely a matter of hard riding and endurance, and for these Wallace was much better prepared by his active summer, largely passed in the saddle, than were either Vance or the miners; the former had spent the last ten months mainly in the store, while the others, though they had been engaged in heavy out-of-door labor, were totally unused to horseback riding. But, in spite of stiff limbs and aching joints, the men doggedly persisted in keeping on by long marches. Several times they saw Indians watching them from the hills, and twice the red men were in large force. But the numbers and forbidding appearance of the travelers, together with the fact that they were all well mounted and unincumbered with wagons, seemed to deter the Indians from attacking. On the third day after leaving Bozeman, the

party crossed the Bighorn and the miners joined their waiting train just outside Fort Smith, while Wallace and Vance rode on into the stockade.

They found that they had arrived in the nick of time, as one of the officers of the garrison had received orders transferring him to the East on recruiting service, and he was preparing to start for Fort Phil Kearney that night with a small escort. The boys joined him and on the following morning they camped in the valley of Goose Creek. No Indians came in sight during the day, a fact which led the travelers to conclude that they must be concentrated either at Fort Phil Kearney or else around a train corralled somewhere along the road. The next night, on reaching the fort, they learned that their last surmise was correct. A small train of about a dozen wagons had been overwhelmed in the Peno Valley that day, not many hours after leaving the fort, westward bound. Several men had been killed and wounded, the wagons set on fire and destroyed, and the stock slain or captured by the Indians; while the surviving emigrants, driven to bay in a ravine, would have soon been annihilated had not a detach-

ment of troops arrived on the scene and rescued them.

This appalling news made the boys feel very serious, indeed, especially Wallace, on whom rested the responsibility for the safety of his own train. But a conversation with General Carrington served partly to restore his confidence, as that officer pointed out to him that, by their own admission, the men with the destroyed emigrant train had failed in every particular to comply with the General's orders to emigrants, copies of which were posted in the sutlers' stores at all the posts of the Mountain District; that is, at Forts Caspar, Reno, Phil Kearney, and C. F. Smith, as well as at Fort Laramie. They had proceeded west from Fort Phil Kearney without notifying the commanding officer of their intention to do so; they had heeded peace signals made to them by Indians in the Peno Valley and had stopped to trade; and in stopping they had failed to corral and had left their train strung out in column, so that when a treacherous attack was made upon them by the warriors with whom they were bartering, they were absolutely helpless. Such ac-

tions on the part of the emigrants were all contrary to the commanding officer's published orders and recommendations, and he impressed upon Wallace the necessity of giving full effect to these orders and recommendations if he wished to feel a reasonable assurance of safety in bringing his own train up. Wallace was quite willing to concede the wisdom of such advice, having seen its value demonstrated.

The boys lost one day awaiting the departure of the detachment which was going to Fort Laramie with the officer from Fort Smith and two other officers from Fort Kearney who had also been ordered to new stations. The day was an unusually quiet one so far as hostilities were concerned; there were no alarms from the pickets either on Pilot or Sullivant's Hills, and the wood train made an uneventful trip to the Pinery and back. Wallace and Vance passed a great part of the day in sleep, making up for the previous night spent in the saddle and preparing for the equally wakeful night ahead; and at ten o'clock they set out with the detachment on their southward journey.

About two o'clock, when they stopped to rest for

a moment at Rock Creek, a tributary of Lodge Pole Creek, which in turn flows into Powder River, Wallace danced a breakdown to stir his blood as he stood holding Sandy's bridle, for the autumn night was far from warm. He said to Vance: "I ought to develop eyes like a cat's pretty soon, with all this night traveling I 've been doing lately. If it keeps on this way the soldiers won't ever travel in the daytime. Red Cloud ought to get up to date and borrow some lessons from Little Phil Sheridan about night attacks."

"Yes, aw f'om ole Jeb Stuaht," Vance returned. "Say, Wallace, why don't the Injins stih up mo' trouble at night, anyhow?"

"Don't you know?" Wallace asked. "Why, it 's superstition, so I 've heard. They 're afraid to, because they think that a warrior who is killed in battle in the darkness will have to spend eternity in darkness. That 's a notion to scare anybody who believes it, is n't it?"

"Well, I should reckon it is!" acknowledged Vance. "I 'd suah stay a long ways f'om a fight if I thought that."

They mounted again and pushed on, and dawn found them snugly hidden near the road in a ravine on Crazy Woman's Fork. This stream, according to tradition, was so named because in an early day a white woman belonging to a party of adventurous pioneers who were following the trail of Father De Smet, the missionary, here went insane and wandered away, after her husband had been killed and frightfully mutilated by the Indians. Another night's travel brought the wayfarers to Fort Reno, where they rested through the day and then pressed on for Fort Laramie, which was reached without misadventure three days later.

Wallace found the family and the train as he had left them, except that two of the drivers had deserted, alarmed by the tales they had heard of Indian atrocities along the Bozeman Road. This, however, was a loss easily to be supplied from the many rough but courageous frontier characters who were always to be picked up around such a place as Fort Laramie. Nor did Wallace content himself with two new drivers; he hired seven, intending to haul the wagons separately instead of coupled in pairs,

as they had been so far, and so to increase his armed force by having one driver for each wagon. But he found other embarrassments of a much more serious character than missing drivers. In the first place there were only two other trains at the fort destined for Montana, amounting altogether to twenty-seven wagons. These were in charge of sensible, cautious men who had heeded the warning of the post commander against venturing into the Indian country in too small numbers, and had been waiting a week, both for Wallace to return and join his train to theirs, and also in the hope that other trains would come in to add further strength to the party. But it was becoming late in the season, being now the middle of October. Immigration was slacking up, and Wallace and the other wagon-masters, on interviewing the post commander, found that he did not expect many more trains to traverse the Bozeman Road before winter. This meant that it would be worse than useless to waste any time in waiting for reënforcements, which might not come at all, while every day increased the danger of encountering heavy snows along the bases of the Big-

horns which might impede progress very seriously.

But to Wallace it also meant that if they were to go ahead with only thirty-seven wagons, he dare not take his mother and the children. His father had told him not to proceed himself and, especially, not to take the family with less than fifty wagons; and this accorded with the advice of General Carrington and with his own judgment, especially after what he had seen on the trip down. Nor could he fall back on the alternative of sending his mother around *via* Fort Bridger because he learned at Laramie that the Great South Pass and the passes through the Bear River Mountains were blockaded with early snows almost unparalleled in the history of the country. Communication by this route was still possible but it was both difficult and dangerous; and, while Wallace felt that if he, or better still, he and Vance both, were with them, his mother and the children could make the journey safely, he would not permit them to undertake it alone.

Only one thing, therefore, remained to be done, and that was something on which neither he nor his father had reckoned. It was to leave Mrs.

Smith, Harvey, and Bessie at Fort Laramie until he and Vance took the wagon train to Bozeman, after which one or both of them could return once more and escort the family up by stage. It would be a disagreeable alternative for everyone, as it would mean traveling far into the winter instead of being cozily settled in the new home at Bozeman; moreover, it would be decidedly expensive. But everyone agreed in family session on the evening of Wallace's arrival that nothing else could safely be done; so arrangements were made with the landlady to continue giving board and lodging to her guests for an indefinite period.

Early next morning, the other emigrants being very anxious to get under way, Wallace put his train in motion, promising his mother to be back for her by December first if no unforeseen delays prevented. They had all set their hearts on spending Christmas together in Bozeman, and Wallace was confident that it could be accomplished. With the family furniture which he was taking up in the wagons the house could be largely made ready for occupancy in advance of Mrs. Smith's arrival; and she parted from

her son almost cheerfully, determined to make the best of present disappointments in the anticipation of happier days soon to come.

The journey with the wagon train, especially after it had crossed the North Platte at Bridger's Ferry and entered the hostile country, reminded Wallace and Vance very forcibly of their previous year's journey with Colonel Sawyer. By the way, the Colonel had conducted another train over the Bozeman route to Montana during the summer of 1866, though not by the road he had laid out along the Niobrara, which, in fact, was no longer used by emigrants. Wallace found himself virtually in command of the entire train, as the other wagonmasters, though of age and experience, were totally ignorant of the road they were traveling and, recognizing Wallace's familiarity with it, they deferred to his judgment in everything. Several times before reaching Fort Reno he corralled the wagons on the appearance of Indians; once, on the North Fork of the Cheyenne, he remained in corral all day, repulsing several attacks. Thanks to his good judgment and caution the train suffered no more serious

loss than that of a little time, which was thankfully given as the price of safety.

South of Fort Reno, which was reached ten days out from Fort Laramie, the stock suffered somewhat from lack of forage; for Wallace would not allow the cattle to be herded except close to the corral, and then only by daylight, shutting them up within the circle of wagons as soon as the sun set. But after passing Fort Reno they found much better grazing in the fertile valleys of the streams flowing down from the mountains, where the grass, though now dried up by the frosts of autumn, was still sweet and nutritious.

They came to the crossing of Crazy Woman two days after leaving Reno. Wallace, anxious to reach the protection of Fort Kearney from there in one day's march, so as not to have to camp again in the Indian-infested region within a few miles of the fort, determined to start early the next morning, October 30, and make a forced march, spending the following day at the fort in resting. The plan was successfully carried out, though they did not pass Lake Desmet until just before sunset and it was

nearly dark when they crossed the Little Piney and corralled a few hundred yards from the main gates. Men and animals were alike tired out, but after they had eaten supper, seen to the watering of the stock at the creek, and established the guards, Wallace and Vance walked up to the stockade and, after satisfying the sentry as to their identity, were admitted through the wicket.

"By crackey, boy!" whispered the sentry to Wallace, cautiously looking around to see that the Sergeant of the Guard was not near to catch him talking while on duty, "you 've got here just in time for the big doin's!"

"Why, what 's up, Dave?" asked Wallace, recognizing the soldier as one of those who had been in Van Volzah's mail escort some six weeks before.

"Tomorrer we get a lay-off from wood-choppin'; first in three months," returned the other. "It 's muster day for pay an' inspection; an', besides that, the fort 's all finished accordin' to plans, an' we 're goin' to dedicate the new flagstaff an' h'ist the garrison flag. It 'll be the biggest time ever happened in Absaraka, the land of the Crows."

"Land of the Sioux, you mean," grinned Wallace. "Let them catch a Crow daring to claim it!"

"Well, it used to be Crow, anyhow," persisted the soldier, "an' that 's what the General calls it. But, sure enough, you 're goin' to stay tomorrer, ain't you, Wallace?"

"Yes, we are," returned Wallace, "and I 'm glad we 've happened along just in time to share a holiday with you fellows. You 've certainly earned it."

So saying, he and Vance went on to the sutler's store of Mr. Botsford, where for an hour they visited with soldiers who were off duty and who had been spending half the day in burnishing up arms and equipments for the morrow, when they were to wear new uniforms at the ceremonies in place of the threadbare garments which had served them through so many months of continuous labor. When the boys reached the train again they were full of anticipation of the unusual holiday, which would mean so much to the faithful soldiers of the Eighteenth Infantry. Fortunately, the night passed without alarms, and when Vance, awaking first in the morning, thrust his head out from his blankets

and looked upward at the clear stars, just beginning to pale before the coming glow of dawn, he reached over and shook Wallace, exclaiming, "Wake up, Yank! It 's goin' to be a day made to ohdeh fo' a gah'ison flag to blow out acco'din' to regulations."

Wallace threw his blankets aside and sprang up, and the two boys engaged in a vigorous wrestling match to put their blood in circulation. The rest of the camp, meantime, had awakened, and up at the fort the clear notes of the bugle could be heard blowing reveille. Breakfast and the watering of the stock were soon disposed of, and then everyone, except the necessary strong guards over the herd and the corral, repaired to the fort to witness events there.

Upon gaining the edge of the parade ground the boys stopped and looked in surprise and admiration at the new flagstaff, which had been erected in position since their stop at the fort three weeks before. It was a splendid piece of ship-carpentry, as fine a staff as could have been found in any of the great army posts of the East. It stood in the middle of the parade ground, rising one hundred and twenty-

four feet above the surface of the ground, with a platform between the mainmast and the topmast, the halyards reeved ready for the flag to be braced to them. At the base of the staff was an octagonal bandstand, and a temporary platform stood opposite the headquarters building for the accommodation of the officers, ladies, and visitors during the ceremonies. Walking across the parade, the boys passed a number of officers and men, most of whom bowed or spoke to Wallace cordially. They were all moving briskly in the crisp morning air, and their smooth, spotless new uniforms seemed to stiffen the backs and brighten the spirits of the soldiers immeasurably. The detachments which regularly garrisoned the blockhouses at Piney Island had been called in for the occasion and swelled the martial throng not a little. Presently, seeing Van Volzah strolling toward the sutler's store with an air of holiday leisure, Wallace hailed him.

"Why, hello, Smith!" said the scout. "What are you doing here?" He extended his hand cordially.

Wallace explained, and after he had introduced Vance the three went on together to the sutler's,

where they found a crowd of teamsters, frontiersmen, and emigrants gathered, chief among them being Major Bridger, sitting on a vinegar barrel smoking his pipe as he gazed meditatively out across the parade ground.

"It 's a great day fer the boys yere, thet 's sartin," said the Major to Wallace, after they had exchanged greetings. "They 've worked hard an' 'arned it, an' I hope the Injin varmints won't put in an' spile nothin'."

"Jim 's always got 'the varmints' on the brain," spoke up a dashing young scout, one of several at the fort, who was sitting on the steps of the store, dressed in an elaborate suit of fringed buckskin, with many Indian decorations. "Can't we forget 'em to-day, Major?"

"If ye do," returned the veteran, stolidly, "I warrant ye they won't forgit *you* an' yer long-ha'red scalp, leetle Bitter Creek Charlie."

"Oh, well, then, if you say so, we won't forgit 'em," answered the youth, lightly. "Jim, he 's the 'riginal, double-dyed, twist-barreled scout, what come to this country 'fore the Sioux found their way

up outen the hot place," he explained jovially to the bystanders. Then, with a wink, he began to sing, while Bridger, with studied indifference, heeded him no more than if he were a buzzing fly:

Ye 've all heerd tell o' Bridger;
I used to run with Jim,
An' many a hard day's scoutin'
I 've done 'longside o' him.
Well, once near old Fort Reno
A trapper used to dwell,
We called him ol' Pap Reynolds,
The scouts all knew him well.

One night in the spring o' 'fifty
We camped on Powder River
An' killed a calf o' buffalo
An' cooked a slice o' liver.
While eatin', quite contented,
I heerd three shots or four;
Put out the fire an' listened,—
We heerd a dozen more.

"Oh, Lawd!" groaned Van Volzah. "Bitter Creek, do you know the whole of 'California Joe'? Chop off about seventeen verses and come to the finish. We 've got something else to do today than listen to you squall."

"I 'll do better 'n that, Van," laughed the young

fellow. "I 'll quit right now. There goes the bugle blowin' 'assembly.' "

The men who were gathered around the sutler's store commanded a good view of the whole fort, so they remained there while the soldiers fell into ranks before the barracks. But when the companies, responding with disciplined snap to the sharp commands of their officers, broke into column of fours and, with the regimental band ahead and colors ruffling gayly in the morning breeze, marched out through the main gates upon the plain between the stockade and the Big Piney for parade and inspection, the spectators, including the ladies and children of the garrison, all streamed out after them.

"Say!" exclaimed Vance to Wallace, his cheeks flushing at the sight, "don't it do yo' heaht good to see troops swingin' off like that once mo'? Hep, hep, hep, jest like a clock! These boys ain't fo'gotten theih smahtness, even if they have been maulin' timbeh fo' three months. I ain't seen the like since Gen'al Joe Johnston reviewed the Ahmy of Tennessee at Dalton in the spring of 'sixty-fouh."

The ceremonies on the plain before the fort were

not short, and they were interesting in every detail. To the onlookers it seemed that the time came very soon when the companies marched back into the stockade and out upon the parade ground, where they formed three sides of a hollow square around the flagstaff. The platform, which was filled by the ladies, the officers, and the children, filled the fourth side, while the band took its place in the stand at the base of the staff. The boys, with Van Volzah and Bridger, were shown to seats on the platform, the rustling and shuffling of the small crowd settling into place gradually ceased; then the troops came into position, aligned their ranks by "right, dress," and then stood "at ease."

Then General Carrington arose, his dark-blue uniform standing out in sober contrast to the gay dresses of the ladies behind him, and announced that the ceremonies of flag-raising would begin. Judge J. T. Kinney, formerly Chief Justice of Utah Territory, then read a poem; Chaplain White offered prayer; and Principal Musician Barnes, who, with young William Daley, had fashioned the flagstaff, presented a patriotic original poem, which was read.

General Carrington himself then stepped forward and delivered, as follows, the chief address of the day. It was listened to with deep interest by every-one present, but by no one with greater sympathy and warmer approval than by Wallace, who knew how true was its every statement of hardship and heroism, and how just its every tribute to duty nobly performed.

Officers and Men:

Three and one-half months ago stakes were driven for the now perfected outlines of Fort Philip Kearney. Aggressive Indians threatened to exterminate the command. Our advent cost us blood. Private Livenberger of F Company was the first victim, July 17, 1866. Lieutenant Daniels, Private Callery of G Company, Gilchrist and Johnson of E Company, Fitzpatrick of H Company, and Oberly and Hauser, have also, in the order named, given their lives to redeem our pledge never to yield one foot of advance, but to guarantee a safe passage for all who seek a home in the lands beyond.

Fifteen weeks have passed, varied by many skirmishes and by both day and night alarms, but that pledge holds good. In every work done, your arms have been in hand. In the pine tracts or in the hay fields, on picket or general guard duty, no one has failed to find a constant exposure to some hostile shaft, and to feel that a cunning adversary was watching every chance to harass and kill.

And yet that pledge holds good. Stockade and blockhouse, embrasure and loop-hole, shell and bullet, have warned off danger, so that women and children now notice the savage only to look for fresh occasion for you to punish him and, with righteous anger, to avenge the dead.

The Indian dead outnumber your own fourfold, while your acquired experience and better cause afford you constant success in every encounter. This is not all. Substantial warehouses, containing a year's supply, spacious and enduring quarters, and a well-appointed magazine are other proofs of your diligence and spirit. The steam whistle and the rattle of the mower have followed your steps in this westward march of empire. You have built a central post that will bear comparison with any for security, completeness, and adaptation to the end in view, wherever the other may be located or however long in erection.

Surrounded by temptations to hunt the choicest game, and allured by tales of gold just beyond you, you have spared your powder for your foes and have given the labor of your hands to your proper work. Passing from guard-mounting to fatigue-work, and often, after one night in bed, returning to your post as sentry, attempting with success all trades and callings, and handling the broadax and hammer, the saw and the chisel, with the same success with which you have sent the bullet, your work has proven how well deserved was the confidence I repose in all of you; and that same old pledge holds good.

Coincident with your march to this point was the occupation of Fort Reno, first by B Company of this battalion, afterwards reënforced by F Company, and the advance of Companies D and G to Fort C. F. Smith, nearly one hundred miles farther west. All these, like yourselves, having a share in the labor, the exposure, and the conflicts that throughout the whole length of the line attended its occupation, have sustained the good record of the Eighteenth Infantry, and thus, also, have vindicated your pledges.

And now, this day, laying aside the worn and battered garments, which have done their part through weeks of toil and struggle, this veteran battalion of the Eighteenth Infantry, from which perhaps I shall soon be parted in the changes of army life and organization, puts on the full dress attire for muster and review.

The crowning office, without which you would regard your work as scarcely begun, is now to be performed, and to its fulfillment I assign soldiers, neither discharging the duty myself nor delegating it to some brother officer; but some veteran soldier of good repute shall share with a sergeant from each of the companies and the worthy men whose work rises high above us, the honor of raising our new and beautiful Garrison Flag to the top of the handsomest flagstaff in America.

It is the first full "Garrison Flag" that has floated between the Platte and Montana; and this beautiful pole, perfect in detail as if wrought and finished in the navy yards of New York, Philadelphia, or Boston, will be to Sergeant Barnes (whose appropriate verses will be read to you), and to William Daley, a long-remembered trophy to their patriotism and skill; a new impulse to your future exertions; a new cause for pride, as its stars and stripes are daily unfolded; a new source of courage to each traveler westward, and a new terror to foes who dare to assail you.

With music and the roar of cannon we will greet its unfolding.

This day shall be a holiday and a fresh starting-point for future endeavor.

And yet, all is not said that I wish to say! While we exalt the national standard and rejoice in its glory and power, let us not forget the true source of that glory and power.

For our unexampled health and continued success; for this "land of the free and home of the brave"; for our institutions and their fruits, we owe all to the Great Ruler who made and has preserved us.

Let us, then, ask all, with uncovered heads and grateful hearts, to pause in our act of consecration while the Chaplain shall invoke God's own blessing upon that act, so that while this banner rises heavenward, and so shall rise with each recurring sun, all hearts shall rise to the throne of the Infinite, and for this day, its duties and its pleasures, we shall become better men and better soldiers of the great Republic.

As the last word fell from the General's lips and he stepped back to give place to Chaplain White, a moment of intense silence followed, which proved more forcibly than cheering would have done how deep an impression the commander's words had made upon the hearts of his men. Even the most hardened removed their plumed hats and bowed their heads reverently, as the Chaplain offered a brief but eloquent prayer of thanksgiving to God for the blessings of the day. Then the companies came to "parade, rest," and in silence the group of selected non-commissioned officers and enlisted men quickly gathered about the foot of the flagstaff while William Daley took the halyards in hand. In rapid succession the orders rang out:

"Attention!" "Present arms!" "Play!" "Hoist!" "Fire!"

The boys sprang to their feet with the other spectators and, snatching off their hats, stood with flashing eyes and hotly beating pulses as, at the same instant, the three hundred muskets flew to the "present" with one loud snap; the howitzers opened their thunderous salute of twenty-one guns; the

drum corps crashed out the long roll, followed by the full band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner," and the great Garrison Flag, thirty-six feet long by twenty feet wide, rose slowly to the peak of the staff and burst out to its full length in a magnificent blaze of color.

General Carrington would permit no cheering on an occasion of such exalted dignity, but tears streamed down the face of more than one woman, and the eyes of many a man were wet, as they gazed at the superb flag floating overhead, and realized what toils and sacrifices had placed it there and what a glorious future for the wilderness land its presence foreshadowed. Wallace felt a hand on his arm and turned to look into Vance's glowing face.

"Yank," said the Southern boy, in a tone so low that none but Wallace could hear, "that 's the most beautiful flag the sun of Heaven eveh shone on. I 'm thankful f'om the bottom of my heaht no otheh flag eveh took its place, o' eveh will."

Wallace made no answer except to give his friend a quick, firm hand-clasp, and then they stood silent again as the troops, in long, straight company fronts,

passed in review before the commanding officer, the band playing "Hail Columbia" until the last company reached its quarters and was dismissed.

A few moments after dinner the boys, passing out through the gates to witness the games and races with which the soldiers were going to enjoy the bright, sunny afternoon, fell in with a group of officers, including Captains Fetterman, Ten Eyck and Brown and Lieutenant Wands.

"Glad you could be here, Smith," said Lieutenant Wands, who had not forgotten Wallace's part in the skirmish at Piney Island a few weeks before. "You seem like one of us, you have been here so much. When are you going on with your train?"

"Tomorrow morning," Wallace replied, "if the Indians will let us."

Captain Fetterman, an officer whose quick movements and restless eyes someway seemed to harmonize with the rather discontented curve given to his mouth by the drooping cut of his mustache and Burnside whiskers, looked at Wallace with a smile which had in it a good deal of sarcasm, and said, "If the Indians will let you? I thought you had been

knocking around this country long enough to realize that fifty courageous white men such as you have can take a wagon train safely through any number of Indians if they make up their minds to do it."

Wallace was surprised at the sweeping statement, with which he could not conscientiously agree. So he answered, evasively, "Well, it may be that fifty men with enough courage could do it, Captain Fetterman. But I know that last year when we came through this country with Colonel Sawyer, nearly two hundred of us were held up for two weeks on the Bighorn by the Indians. With the number of men we have in our present train, I should n't like to be attacked by as many Indians as corralled Colonel Sawyer. But maybe I 'm too cautious."

Captain Brown laughed shortly. He was a broad-shouldered, self-reliant-looking man, whose short, pointed beard emphasized a determined lower jaw. "Yes, I 'd call it pretty cautious," said he. "I would undertake to steer a train anywhere with fifty men, if I ever had the chance."

"That 's it," Captain Fetterman remarked, almost savagely, looking at Captain Ten Eyck and speaking

argumentatively, "the Colonel nurses the garrison of Fort Phil Kearney as if we were children. I 've said before, and I say it now, that if I could take eighty of the Civil War veterans of the Eighteenth, we could ride back and forth clear through the Sioux Nation. Red Cloud's savages can't stand up before disciplined men."

Captain Ten Eyck did not seem to wish at this time to renew what was evidently an old subject of discussion among the officers. However, after hesitating for a moment, he said guardedly: "Yes, you think so, and perhaps you 're right. But you know what old Major Bridger told you: 'Your men who fought down South are crazy! They don't know anything about fighting Indians.' But don't let 's argue to-day, Will." He slapped the other on the back, laughing. "Let 's enjoy the holiday and forget 'the varmints,' as Major Bridger calls them."

Fetterman and Brown smiled rather disdainfully at the quotation from Bridger, but they dropped the subject and walked on toward a laughing and shouting crowd of soldiers gathered around an impro-

vised track where a sack race was about to begin, Wallace and Vance falling a little behind them.

"Whew!" said Vance in a low tone when the officers had walked far enough ahead of them to be out of hearing. "They seems to be a diffe'nce of opinion in the councils of the mighty rega'din' the prowess of Red Cloud. How long have they been fightin' Injins, Wallace?"

"Two or three months," Wallace replied. Then he added, very seriously: "They 're brave men; very brave. But you know, and I know, that Captain Fetterman and Captain Brown are away off in their opinion of the Indians. General Carrington is absolutely right not to let them go chasing out with a handful of men, as they want to do, when the garrison is so small. They 'd be massacred, I 'm afraid."

About three o'clock, while the gayety of the day was at its height, the lookouts suddenly gave the alarm of Indians. A war party had swept like magic around the bend of Sullivant's Hills and by the time a detachment of the troops on duty could gallop out of the mill gates to intercept them, the enemy was

bearing down upon some private horses picketed south of the fort. The relief came in time, and the horses were saved; but for an hour the mirrors of the enemy were flashing signals from hill to hill on every side. The great flag floating out from its towering staff seemed to be regarded by the Indians as a special defiance directed at them; and as the sun set and the banner slowly descended at the sound of the retreat gun, groups of warriors stared in sullen hatred at the scene from many a pine-clad ridge and barren, rocky crest.

The resentment of the red men, however, was not allowed to interfere with any of the festivities of the day. For several hours that evening Wallace and Vance watched from the doorways and sometimes from the floor, the brilliant spectacle of the muster evening levee at headquarters, where the full dress uniforms of the officers mingling with the bright evening gowns of the ladies in waltz and quadrille, made a picture they did not soon forget. The throbbing music of the orchestra, composed of members of the regimental band, often came to their ears in

memory, when, on the lonely road beside the plodding cattle and creaking wagons, they thought of the pleasures of Flag Day at Fort Phil Kearney.

CHAPTER XV

THE VALLEY OF FEAR

BY daybreak next morning, in spite of the weariness following the unusual festivities, Wallace and the other wagon-masters had the train in motion, and by sunrise it was skirting the eastern base of Lodge Trail Ridge. The extra men who were not driving teams were all mounted on horseback and marched as advance and rear parties; every driver carried a revolver and had his rifle close at hand, while, to make the train more compact, it marched n double column. General Carrington had told them that in case they should be attacked before they left the valley of Peno Creek and crossed the divide to Goose Creek, they should fire a volley, on hearing which he would send troops to their relief. Though Indians showed themselves in small numbers on Peno Head and the hills to eastward, they declined to attack, seemingly not relishing the appearance of

readiness exhibited by the train; but shortly before noon they attempted a stratagem which might easily have deceived less wary opponents.

The train was marching along the crest of the long, rock-strewn ridge northeast of Lodge Trail Ridge, considerably lower than the latter and on the other side of the valley of the Peno. Owing to the fact that the Peno was bordered by dense brush affording fine opportunities for ambush, the road had been laid over this ridge to avoid the dangerous cover, which, however, was less than a half-mile away and could readily be used by the Indians for massing their forces to rush out on passing trains or other travelers. Presently Wallace saw several Indians ride up from the creek and, stopping on the road some distance ahead of the train, hold up their guns to invite a parley.

"Ah, the villains!" exclaimed Wallace to Vance. "Is n't that cute? They think they 'll get us to stop and trade, and then surprise us from the creek. We won't stop, but it is n't white men's decency to open on those fellows without warning. Come on."

They trotted ahead, Wallace saying to the drivers

as he passed them: "Keep going. We don't want anything to do with those bucks."

The boys rode on a few yards ahead of the advance party until they were within shouting distance of the Indians, when Wallace yelled at the top of his lungs: "We won't talk. Get out or we 'll shoot!"

"Do yo' reckon they 'll undehstand that?" inquired Vance.

"Don't know," Wallace replied. "But I can't say it in Sioux."

Evidently, however, one or more of the Indians had understood, for, after hesitating a moment, they started back toward the creek and then, turning on their ponies' backs, fired at the train. But their guns were short range muskets and, as the boys immediately replied with several quick shots from their Henrys, the Indian ponies burst into a frantic gallop and quickly disappeared in the brush.

No further attempt was made by the enemy during the day to interfere with the progress of the train, and that night corral was formed on Goose Creek. So day after day passed, each with its alarms of Indians and its difficulties of travel, yet each, in spite

of all obstacles, lessening by a substantial number of miles the distance to Bozeman. Two or three snowstorms occurred but none heavy enough, fortunately, to blockade the road. Fort Smith was safely reached and passed, then Pryor's Fork, Clark's Fork, and finally the Yellowstone. On November 12 the wagons rolled into Bozeman and halted before the store, where Mr. Smith rushed out with eager face, only to find, to his bitter disappointment, that his family was not there, after all. Yet, after hearing the details of their journey, he had nothing but praise for Wallace and Vance, who had conducted their expedition through numberless dangers and difficulties more quickly and safely than most of the experienced freighters of the country could have done; and he entirely approved of Wallace's course in leaving the family at Fort Laramie.

The question now arose as to whether Vance should return with Wallace to bring Mrs. Smith and the children to Bozeman. It was not long in being decided. Mr. Smith determined that he should, not because he thought that Vance could be of any material assistance once the boys reached Fort Laramie and

the journey by stage was actually begun, but because he was unwilling to have Wallace make the southward journey by Fort Phil Kearney alone. He felt, and rightly, that the two boys were a great safeguard to each other, and he preferred that Wallace should be accompanied by his true and tried friend.

Nevertheless, the decision that the boys should go back together did not by any means determine when they could start, for the case was the same as it had been in October; it was out of the question for them to go to Fort Smith without other companions. This time, however, there was no strong party of miners opportunely headed in that direction, while, owing to the lateness of the season, there were few chance travelers bound southward along the perilous trail. A number of days passed while the boys waited in the hope of the desired company. Meanwhile, though ready to start at any time, they were busy from morning till night in assisting to unload, check, and arrange the large quantity of goods they had brought for the store, and in putting the furniture in the new house. Mr. Smith had employed another clerk to assist him during the absence of Wallace and Vance;

and during these busy days all had their hands full, even good-natured Dr. Mahan often lending his aid.

At length, one afternoon just before sunset, Vance, stepping out of the front door, was surprised to see five emigrant wagons drawn by mules just approaching on the road from Gallatin City. He waited until they came up and then, walking out into the road as the train stopped, inquired of the leading driver: "Wheh yo' fellows headin' fo'?"

"Dixie, son, an' we reyckon to make hit 'foh spring," replied the driver, grinning. "Want to go home along with we-all?"

Vance's face lighted with its peculiar half-sad smile as he recognized the dialect of a fellow countryman, but he shook his head as he replied: "Po' old Dixie 's too povehty-struck these days fo' a fellow to go back home unless he takes his fohtune with him, an' I hope you-all ahe doin' that. But if yo' ahe projectin' to go down by the Bozeman Road, they 's a couple of us what suah want to go paht way with yo'."

"That 's haow we aim to go," rejoined the driver. "They 's sixteen of us cleaned up a nice stake an'

sold aout ouh claims an' we reyckoned we was strong 'nough to git daown to the Pacific Railroad an' then travel Saouth like gentlemen. Two mo' with us 'll be nighty welcome."

So it was arranged, and the following morning Wallace and Vance set out for Fort Smith with the homeward-bound fortune-hunters, leaving the store again in charge of only Mr. Smith and the new clerk; but all were confident that the week before Christmas, at the latest, would find them together in Bozeman, with the much desired addition of Mrs. Smith and the children. The mule teams traveled nearly twice as fast as the cattle of an average train, especially as the wagons of the miners were but lightly loaded with their strong boxes, clothing, and furs, and enough supplies and grain to last themselves and their animals to the railroad, which, according to latest advices in Montana, had been completed nearly to the mouth of the North Platte, in Nebraska, two hundred and ninety-one miles west of Omaha, where the winter's road-end town was being hastily erected. After four days of travel the boys found themselves at Fort Smith. But that night a heavy snowstorm compelled

the wagons to stop; and as it seemed from the condition of the road that they might be delayed there for some time, Wallace and Vance were glad to find a detachment of soldiers going down to Fort Kearney whom they could join, as they knew that if they should encounter delays farther down the road with this party, the wagons would sooner or later overtake them.

To their surprise, the boys found that the detachment, which was from Fort Kearney, was composed of twenty-five men of the Second Cavalry, under Second Lieutenant Horatio S. Bingham, of that regiment. It seemed that since they had passed Fort Kearney with their wagons, Lieutenant Bingham had come up from Fort Laramie with sixty-five cavalrymen to reënforce the garrison. But more than half of the new men were raw recruits, and they were armed with old Enfield rifles or antiquated carbines; altogether an unpromising combination for the sort of work going on around Fort Phil Kearney in those days of late November and early December. The detachment encountered at Fort Smith had just escorted a supply train up, and was about to return

when the boys arrived. Though poorly armed, the party was large enough to travel by daylight, and next morning Wallace and Vance rode for some time at the head of the little column with Lieutenant Bingham and the guide, Brennan, one of General Carrington's small staff of expert scouts, of whom Major Bridger was the chief.

The boys found Bingham to be a young officer of very pleasant and sociable disposition, and they were soon on friendly terms with him, exchanging stories and anecdotes of personal experience during the intervals when they were not plowing through snow drifts too heavy to make conversation pleasant. At length the topic of discussion was the war around Fort Phil Kearney.

"If you came past Kearney five weeks ago," said Bingham, "you have n't any idea how many Indians are around there now. I 've been there only about three weeks, but there are hundreds more of them in the vicinity, and they are much more aggressive than when I first came. A few days back I went out to relieve the wood train when it was attacked, and I never saw so many Indians, except once."

"When was that?" asked Vance.

"At the battle of Tahkahokuty, near the Little Missouri River, two years ago," answered Bingham.

"What?" exclaimed Wallace. "Were you in that fight?"

"Yes. I was a captain in the Second Minnesota Cavalry," Bingham replied. "I was mustered out of the volunteers only last April and took my lieutenant's commission in the regulars. Why, were you there too?"

"I should say I was," returned Wallace. "Only a high private in the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, but I saw a lot of the fighting because I was acting as one of General Sully's orderlies."

"Shake!" cried Bingham, gayly, extending his hand. "We 're both Minnesotans, then, and there is n't a better State to hail from." Then he lowered his voice so that the soldiers trotting behind them could not hear him. "I wish I had sixty-five of my old Minnesota company here instead of this mixed-up crowd of rookies from every State and nation under the sun. We could certainly make a

hunting trip down Tongue River Valley then, as Captain Brown and Captain Fetterman want to do."

"I hope they won't try to do that, Lieutenant," said Wallace, seriously, while Brennan, a silent but attentive listener, gave him an approving glance. "These Indians around here are n't a joke, by any means; and if small parties are too rash they 'll be wiped out some time."

"Do you think so?" the Lieutenant asked, rather incredulously. "You 're preaching the doctrine of Bridger and Brennan." He glanced at the guide with a smile. "They all say that, but you know Fetterman and Brown and Grummond have been out time after time and chased Red Cloud's lambs all over the country, and sent lots more of them to the Happy Hunting Grounds than the General himself and Captain Ten Eyck and Captain Powell and Lieutenant Wands and all the rest, with their everlasting caution. I begin to believe these scouts are leery of the redskins' feathers and war-paint."

"Don't believe it too hard, Lieutenant," said Brennan, gruffly, opening his mouth for the first time. "There 's a heap o' sharp claws underneath

them feathers, an' when they scratch they scratch deep, I tell ye."

Lieutenant Bingham seemed far from convinced, but he dropped the subject and they rode on briskly. In about a day's travel, passing beyond the region affected by the heavy snowfall around Fort Smith, they made more rapid progress and in due course reached Fort Kearney, where the boys found they could not proceed for several days owing to the fact that no mail escorts or other parties were due to leave for Laramie within that length of time.

The Indians were no less numerous in the vicinity of the fort than Lieutenant Bingham intimated. They had completed their fall hunting and secured their supplies for the season of snows, and now, contrary to their usual habit of remaining close to their villages during the winter, they appeared to be trooping in from every direction to spend the cold months in harassing the garrison of Fort Phil Kearney. The wolves seldom howled at night now, as they had been accustomed to do, around the slaughter-yard on the Little Piney below the fort; and the soldiers had learned that when the wolves

were not near, the Indians usually were. Indeed, sharpshooting warriors several times crawled up at night close enough to shoot sentinels on the sentry walk behind the stockade.

The second morning of the boys' enforced stay, December 6, dawned clear and quite cold. Timber was still being hauled from the Pinery for the completion of the post hospital building and some still unfinished warehouses, but the garrison looked forward to soon completing the work and then remaining snugly in the fort during the rest of the winter. The men with the timber train were therefore eager to start early and get in a full day's work; Wallace and Vance, having nothing else to do, joined the train, which marched out of the stockade a little after eight o'clock, before sunrise. An escort of infantry soldiers rode in the wagons, but Wallace and Vance trotted just ahead on their horses.

No lookout was being maintained on Sullivant's Hills now—it was too dangerous—but as they went out through the mill gates and turned westward, the boys noticed the mounted picket on top of Pilot Hill watching the train, and realized that from that ele-

vated point the wagons would be in sight the entire distance across the seven miles of open prairie until they should descend the bluffs at the Big Piney and enter the woods. The train pushed forward briskly along the southern slope of Sullivant's Hills, the wagons, as usual, moving in two columns about fifty yards apart. They had proceeded perhaps three miles, having lost sight of the fort around the curve of the hills, when Wallace and Vance halted abruptly as they saw a stream of mounted Indians come sweeping across the Big Piney from Peno Valley and along the northeastern end of Sullivant's Hills, bearing down upon the train. The boys reined their horses around, waved their hands at the teamsters and shouted in unison: "Indians! Indians! Corral! Corral!"

The sergeant in command of the escort roared some orders and with accustomed rapidity the leading wagons of each column and several of those following turned inward and formed a line facing to the rear across the space between the columns, the middle wagons of each column trotted up with the mule teams on the inside, each covered by the wagon

ahead, and the rear wagons obliqued in to form the fourth side of the square. In the time that it takes to tell it, the corral was formed with the escort and all teams on the inside. This was accomplished none too soon, for more than a hundred Indians, followed by throngs of others pouring out of the valley of the Peno, were circling the train, their ponies at a dizzy gallop, before the last wagon was in place, though the fire of the escort speedily drove them to a respectful distance.

"What 's the next number on the programme?" asked Wallace of a sergeant, as the enemy fell back.

The sergeant grinned. "Reënforcements from Fort Kearney comin' to the rescue from the wings," he answered, easily. "Footlights up, spot-light on this here devoted band. Ye mind, I used to shift scenery at Wallack's Theayter, New York. You 've got glasses. Can ye see if the picket on Pilot Hill has tumbled to the row yet?"

Wallace focused his field glasses on the distant hill and answered: "I can see some men up there riding their horses in circles."

"All right, then," said the sergeant. "That 's

the signal. We 'll have some cavalry down here in a jiffy.''

Indeed, only a few moments passed before the men of the escort, lying flat in the wagon boxes, saw in the distance along the road to the fort a column of mounted men approaching them at a gallop. The Indians saw them, too, and, ceasing their attack on the train, strung out in a long, irregular line of battle and fell slowly back over the slope of Sullivant's Hill into the valley of the Peno. On approaching the train, the mounted relief party went into line by the right flank facing the enemy and pushed forward in pursuit over the open ground, four or five men detaching themselves and riding rapidly to the train. As they came up it was seen that they were Captain Fetterman, Lieutenant Bingham, and some privates.

''Any of your men hurt?'' asked Captain Fetterman of the sergeant in charge of the train, as he reined up.

''No, sir,'' replied the non-commissioned officer, saluting.

''About how many Indians do you think attacked you?''

"It 's hard to say, sir, but a couple of hundred, at least."

"Well, go on to the Pinery," ordered the Captain as he turned away. "We 'll take care of the Indians."

Lieutenant Bingham, meantime, seeing Wallace and Vance, beckoned to them and they rode out to him.

"You fellows better come with us," said he, "and we 'll show you how to chase Indians. I have fifteen of my cavalry rookies here and there are twenty-five mounted infantry, while General Carrington and Lieutenant Grummond are going up the Bozeman Road with thirty men to catch the enemy in the rear when we drive them over Lodge Trail Ridge. There 'll be some warm fighting, I think."

Wallace looked at Vance. "Want to go?" he asked.

"Suah," drawled Vance. "We can't leahn any youngeh how to chase Injins; an' these heah ahe the professohs."

Captain Fetterman was already galloping northward after his men; and as Lieutenant Bingham

started also, the boys touched spurs to their horses and followed. When they came up, they found that Captain Brown and Lieutenant Wands were also with the skirmish line, which was advancing at a trot over the sloping ground, firing occasionally at the enemy ahead, who made but feeble attempts to stand, retreating steadily, instead, into the valley of the Peno.

As they crossed the highest shoulder of Sullivant's Hills the soldiers commanded a wide view of Peno Valley, extending away down to the Tongue River, far in the north, and they could see many Indians riding over the slopes near Lodge Trail Ridge and into the brush along the creek. On the distant stretch of the Bozeman Road which was in view between the Big Piney and the far end of the Ridge, the General's detachment was not visible, though it was possible that it might have passed this stretch already and be hidden now behind the Ridge.

"They 's too many Injins around heah to be actin' the way they ahe, if they ahe playin' faih," Vance confided to Wallace, uneasily. "What do they keep

runnin' foh? They 's enough of 'em right now to fight us to a standstill, an' they could if they wanted to. I 'm afraid they ahe drawin' us into somethin'."

"So am I," agreed Wallace, who had been thinking the same thing. "But we 're in for it now, and we 'll have to see it through. Nearly all the officers who are hot after Indian scalps are here, and they 'll push the fighting for all there is in it."

The skirmish line, thrown forward vigorously by its leaders, descended the slope to the Big Piney, shutting off the view ahead; then it crossed the stream and came up on the lower ground beyond. A mile away the bare slopes of Lodge Trail Ridge rose before them, a small branch of Peno Creek extending along its base beyond their left. As the troops advanced, the enemy seemed suddenly to recover confidence and, re-forming their lines along the slope of the Ridge, opened a vigorous fire. The advance slowed to a walk and the men found their hands full with loading and firing, though they still pressed on until they held the northwestern slope of the Ridge and then descended into the little valley of the Peno, beyond which the Bozeman Road

climbed over the low divide northwest of the Ridge.

The enemy, fighting with ever-increasing boldness, stubbornly holding their ground in front, and endeavoring to pass the flanks of their opponents, finally shook the confidence of the young cavalry recruits, and the latter began to show unmistakable signs of weakening, looking frequently toward the rear and lagging behind the skirmish line.

"This won't do," exclaimed Wallace, as he and Vance rode near Lieutenant Bingham. "Let 's get in the line, Vance, and try to help steady them."

Accordingly they pushed in and were pumping their rifles steadily yet always with careful aim, at the dodging, circling Indians in front, when they heard Captain Fetterman, far down the line, shout, exultantly: "There comes the General! Now we have them, boys!"

Glancing across the little valley, everyone could see a column not far away coming up the road from the fort. Its direction was such that it took the Indians facing Fetterman's detachment in rear of their left flank. The warriors in that direction quickly discovered that they were about to be caught

between two fires. Their line dissolved and they fled up the road.

"Good!" exclaimed Vance. "We ahe gettin' 'em on the jump. If only—"

He was interrupted by a hand grasping his arm, and he turned to look into the boyish face of Lieutenant Bingham, red with fierce excitement. His saber was clutched in his hand and his horse was plunging under the rowels unconsciously pressed into its sides by the rider. "Come!" shouted the young officer, hoarsely, above the rattle of the musketry. "Now 's the time to ride the red devils down!" Then, seeing the boys hesitate, a scowl of bitter scorn swept over his face. "You 're afraid," he sneered.

Wallace turned upon him as if he had been struck in the face with a whip. "By Heaven, we 're not afraid," he growled through gritted teeth. "Lead on!"

Without an answering word, Bingham turned and struck the spurs savagely into his horse's flanks. The good brute uttered a snort of pain and shot off like an arrow, straight for the fleeing Indians, his

rider lying low on his neck, the gleaming saber-point beside the horse's ears. Urging their own horses to full speed, the boys followed, accompanied by Sergeant Bowers and two or three of the more stout-hearted cavalrymen, who, in the general confusion, had noticed their commander's departure; for Bingham had given no order for his men to follow or, if he had, it had been unheard.

As they tore after the Lieutenant, whose frantic horse was gaining a greater lead on them at every stride, Wallace called to Vance: "It 'll be hand to hand. Use your revolver."

They both jammed the muzzles of their rifles into their carbine-boots and drew their revolvers. As the handful of white men, strung out like a pack of wolves, swept around the point of the hill out of sight of Fetterman's command, Wallace looked around and caught a bare glimpse of the leaderless cavalry galloping across the valley as if in flight toward the General's party. But he had no time to wonder. Bingham and his followers, in passing the point of the hill, had come in the rear of the Indians who were still fronting Fetterman on the opposite

slope, and as they rode diagonally across the Bozeman Road, they encountered three or four more men riding furiously to join them. The leader of this party was Lieutenant Grummond, upon whose face was the same expression of fierce exultation in the man-hunt which Vance had seen on the face of Lieutenant Bingham. Evidently Grummond and his companions had left General Carrington's party as unceremoniously as Bingham had left Fetterman's, all being equally intent on giving the fleeing Indians the cold steel.

Another hill, east of the road, arose ahead of the pursuers, its slopes dotted with fugitive warriors; and here, at length, the large American horses succeeded in overtaking some of the Indian ponies. The white men, each one intent on his own quarry, scattered, some continuing to ride on while others attacked and cut down the warriors they had overhauled. Bingham, still in the lead but closely followed by Grummond and Sergeant Bowers, swerved to the left to follow the lower edge of the hill and disappeared around it, hacking with his saber at a dismounted warrior. Wallace and Vance had both

fired two or three shots at close quarters with their revolvers and were doing their full share of the fighting in the little valley, when Vance happened to glance behind. His face turned white and he moistened his suddenly dry lips with his tongue. "Good God! Wallace, look!" he cried. "They 've cut us off!"

It was true. Across the neck of the valley separating them from the Bozeman Road, thirty or more Indians were galloping down upon them. Wallace gave them one glance, then turned his eyes desperately to the point where the officers had disappeared. As he looked, Lieutenant Grummond came racing around the base of the hill, a dozen warriors at his back. One of the near-by privates shouted: "Get together, men! We must cut our way out or we are goners!"

The soldiers obeyed their comrade mechanically, as did the boys, all spurring in together and then charging straight into the advancing Indians in the rear. But the enemy did not give way as usual. Inspired by an overwhelming confidence in their numbers, they closed in on the white men with whirling

hatchets and clubbed muskets, lances, revolvers, and knives.

An instant before the hand-to-hand conflict for life began, Lieutenant Grummond rushed up, crying, as if almost insane with grief and horror: "Bingham did n't come out! God pity him, he 's back there!"

Wallace caught his breath with a sound like a sob but there was time for no word. Leaping to the head of his men Grummond rose in his stirrups, slashing left and right with his saber and fairly hewing a pathway through the plunging, yelling mass of his opponents. Ably his men seconded him, fighting madly for life with sabers, clubbed muskets, and carbines. Wallace and Vance had jerked out their rifles and were using them as were the other men, striking and parrying by turns, when all at once before Wallace's eyes, dizzy with the exhaustion of the desperate conflict, loomed a warrior with an upraised hatchet. Wallace lifted his rifle and warded off one blow, but the Indian, his hideously painted face contorted with savage ferocity, whirled his weapon around again like lightning. The muzzle of the guarding rifle could not quite c

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The Indian whirled his weapon like lightning

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the keen, descending blade. A dreadful blow fell on Wallace's head, and a sharp, numbing pain shot through his left shoulder. His rifle rattled from his fingers, and then he himself, seized with overpowering faintness, crumpled up in his saddle and toppled off on the ground.

The hand-to-hand fight was nearly done. The desperate soldiers were already several yards away, having almost cut their way through the mass of their foes. Dimly Wallace perceived that his hour had come, yet it did not seem very terrible. Quite calmly recollections came into his swooning mind of his mother and father, of the store at Bozeman and the old home at Fort Ridgely, and then, oddly enough, of a certain shady swimming-hole in a little creek away back in Wisconsin, where, as a small boy, he had learned to swim. He was just meditating how pleasant the cool water would feel on his burning shoulder and numbed head when he became dreamily conscious of a scuffle close above him, then someone caught him around the waist and swung him up in the air so roughly that an excruciating pain seemed to tear his shoulder to shreds, his every

fainting sense leaped into torturing consciousness and he screamed with pain. The next instant he was slammed, stomach downward, across the neck of a horse with such frightful force that the breath was knocked completely out of him and he hung like an empty sack, head and arms dangling on one side, legs on the other, while the horse plunged away. The violent motions of the animal quickly roused his senses again. He grasped a stirrup-strap hanging beside his right arm and managed to get a glimpse of the rider above him. It was Vance. With a rush of dismay, Wallace made a supreme effort and gasped: "I 'm done for. Drop me. Save yourself."

"Shut your mouth," snapped Vance, without the slightest drawl. "What in thunder do you take me for?"

Wallace had no breath to reply. He could not see that Lieutenant Grummond and several soldiers were beside them now, warding off the Indians; and in a moment his senses left him again, and later happenings were a blank.

At the moment when Wallace fell, Vance was be-

side him. Seeing his friend reel from his saddle, the young Southerner, utterly thoughtless of his own safety, drove his horse headlong against the pony of the Indian who had felled Wallace, knocking pony and rider to the ground. Before the Indian could regain his feet, Vance was over him, his rifle clutched by the muzzle. With terrific force he swung the heavy butt downward, knocking the tomahawk away and crushing the warrior's skull like a nutshell. Then it was that he leaped to the ground and interrupted his friend's brief dreams by heaving him, with strength born of the emergency, across his horse's neck. Not until he was in the saddle again did he realize that Lieutenant Grummond and several men, with the sublime heroism which has glorified the American soldier on countless fields, had ridden back to his aid, sacrificing the advantage they had already gained for their own safety, and holding back the enemy for a few brief seconds, had saved both his own life and that of Wallace.

But they were saved only for the moment; the final salvation was yet to be won. The narrow valley and the broad hillsides bordering it seemed

teeming with warriors. Only three soldiers remained with Lieutenant Grummond; the rest, when they had cut their way out, fled. Spurring their own horses madly, they dashed through the scattered groups of Indians and in a moment gained the road. But behind them surged a howling throng, of whom seven warriors armed with lances were nearest; so near, indeed, that with their spear-heads they could almost touch the backs of the fleeing men whose empty guns and revolvers forbade an effort to do anything except run for life.

As they tore along the base of the hills east of Lodge Trail Ridge, Lieutenant Grummond caught sight of a party of soldiers, up a ravine, and shouted: "For God's sake, come down quick!"

In a second the men on the hill were lost to sight again. But they had heard the shout and came galloping down the ravine upon the pursuing Indians, who scattered and fled before their impetuous charge. Lieutenant Grummond halted his men and turned back. It was General Carrington with six soldiers of his detachment who had saved them. As he came up Grummond cried: "General, Lieuten-

ant Bingham and Sergeant Bowers are back there beyond the second hill. We were cut off, and they didn't come out with us."

The general spoke quickly to a bugler beside him, one of the Second Cavalry men: "Sound recall."

As the clear notes rang out, he turned and intently examined the road and valley down which Grummond's party had come. At least eighty Indians were in sight before the second hill. The General, straightening himself in his saddle, fixed his eyes on Lieutenant Grummond and said:

"We shall have to wait till more men come up before we search. Grummond, you and Bingham have been very reckless. I fear he is killed; it is God's own mercy that you are not. He left his men and they ran away from Fetterman and joined me. Fetterman has been obliged to come over too. Our plans have miscarried, and we have probably suffered a tragedy, due wholly to recklessness."

"I was reckless, sir," admitted Grummond, frankly. "I didn't realize what it meant. I've learned a lesson."

"I hope so," replied the General shortly, and

urged his horse ahead as a strong party of his own detachment came rapidly up the road in response to the bugle call.

With the unconscious form of Wallace still held in front of him, Vance was obliged to go back with the reconnoitering party, not daring to remain alone. The men galloped furiously, the enemy flying before them, and it was really only a few moments after Bingham and Bowers themselves had rounded it, that they swept past the point of the hill where the two men had disappeared.

It was a sad scene upon which they immediately came on the bare prairie. There lay the body of gallant, genial, foolhardy Bingham, stilled in death, and near him the equally brave Bowers, just breathing his last, his skull cleft through with a hatchet, though around him were stretched the bodies of three Indians he had shot with his revolver before being himself overpowered. Silently their comrades gathered around the dead soldiers to await the arrival of the ambulance, for which, as well as for reënforcements, the General had already dispatched a squad to the fort.

As the sun was dropping into the West at the close of the short December day, Wallace was again conscious and suffering keenly. He and Carnahan, a wounded soldier, were tenderly lifted into the ambulance; and then, in the berths on the other side were placed the bodies of the two men who had paid with their lives the penalty of rashness and sealed with their blood another chapter in the heroic annals of the West.

CHAPTER XVI

FETTERMAN CROSSES THE FORBIDDEN RIDGE

IN the completed portion of the post hospital, where Wallace lay next morning, Doctor Horton, Chief Surgeon of the Mountain District, who had himself carefully examined and dressed his wounds, said to him: "You will have to stay in bed for at least ten days, my boy, and you are lucky not to have to stay a month. If that hatchet had gone a half-inch deeper you would have been in very serious shape. As it is, you have only a bad flesh wound."

"But, Doctor," protested Wallace, feebly, "I must hurry on to Fort Laramie after my mother."

"Tut, tut!" returned the Doctor. "You must do as I tell you. Your mother can get down on her knees this morning and thank the Almighty that she has a son living."

Wallace was silent for a moment, then he said,

solemnly: "That 's true, Doctor. I had a very close call. But it 's hard to be laid up this way when I have so much to do. How about my head? It feels a lot worse than my shoulder."

"Your head merely has a big lump on it, that 's all," the Doctor answered. "That hatchet must have struck your skull sidewise and glanced off into your shoulder. You see it 's a good thing to have a thick skull." He spoke with gravity but his eyes twinkled.

During this conversation Vance was sitting beside the cot and Doctor Horton left him with Wallace, cautioning him not to stay more than twenty minutes longer, as too much excitement would be bad for his wounded friend. When they were alone together, Wallace laid his right hand out on the coverlet and Vance took it in a firm but gentle grasp.

"Johnnie," said Wallace, employing the term which he seldom used except in moments of most affectionate intimacy, "you very nearly gave your own life to save mine. You should n't have done it."

"Should n't have done it?" cried Vance, indig-

nantly. "I 'd like fo' yo' to tell me why not. You-all have done everything fo' me, Yank. And, besides, yo' 've got a family that yo' love and that love yo', while I 'm alone in the wohld."

"No, you 're not alone, either," protested Wallace, vehemently. "You 're one of the Smith family, and you know it; just like another son. And besides, you have a career ahead of you, Johnnie."

Vance's lips curved in their downdrawn smile. "Maybe so and maybe not," he answered. "I 'm suah a-goin' to try to make one if I live, but if it neveh happened, nobody would know the diffe'nce—and neitheh would I. Anyhow, they ain't anybody dependin' on me now."

"No, but there will be sometime," avowed Wallace.

"Oh, law!" laughed Vance. "Ah' yo' a-goin' to prophesyin' on matrimony? They ain't a single gihl I eveh knew that would weep one little teah if I got slain on the field of ca'nage."

"Oh, well, all right," said Wallace, resignedly. "Parry it any way you like, but the fact stands that

you saved my life, and I can't ever make it up to you."

"Yo' done made it up long ago, Yank," replied Vance, simply. "So let 's call it quits and fo'get it."

Wallace lay silent for some moments, gazing at the ceiling. A shadow slowly gathered on his face, and at length he said, sorrowfully: "Poor Bingham! I keep thinking of him all the time, Vance. What a shame for such a splendid fellow to go out that way. Do you know when he and the Sergeant are to be buried?"

"Day afteh tomo'ow. Eve'ybody 's mighty sick about him heah, they liked him so much the little while he 's been at the foht. His caval'y boys ah' plumb ashamed, the way they ran off instead of followin' him and they sweah revenge at the fihst chance. And so do Captain Fettehman and Captain Brown. Brown 's ohdehed East fo' promotion but he says he 's goin' to try and get Red Cloud's scalp 'fo' he leaves."

"Oh, of course," said Wallace, making a wry face.

"It seems as if those officers will never see that just that spirit is what ruined poor Bingham."

"The Eighteenth boys ahe wild about Bowehs, too," continued Vance. "Seems he used to lead the hay pahties last summeh and cleaned the redskins out lots of times."

"Yes, he was the best skirmish leader in the garrison," Wallace returned. "I 've often heard the boys talk about him."

"If only we 'd had a few mo' men in that valley we might have saved those two," Vance mused, regretfully. "But we weh 'most done fo' about the time yo' fell off'm Sandy."

"Good old Sandy!" mourned Wallace. "I don't know what I 'll do without him. Was he killed right there?"

"Why, he wa' n't killed theah no' any place else," answered Vance. "We found him alongside the road cleah down by the Piney crossin' when we came in with the ambulance and he 's in the stable now, without a scratch."

"No?" cried Wallace, delightedly. "Oh, I 'm so glad!"

At this moment the boys heard the outer door open and the sound of feminine voices mingling with those of men. Then Vance arose courteously as he saw approaching Wallace's bedside a party which included General and Mrs. Carrington, Mrs. Horton, and Lieutenants Grummond and Wands with their wives. They greeted Wallace with tender solicitude and kindness and, to his surprise and deep pleasure, he found that they had come especially to see himself and Carnahan, who lay on another cot near-by. The ladies had brought to them some little delicacies in the way of food, drawn from their own slender stock of such treasures, which were rare, indeed, in beleaguered Fort Kearney. The officers were full of praise for the gallantry displayed the day before by both Wallace and Vance; and the short visit of the ladies did more to cheer Wallace and Carnahan toward rapid recovery than much medicine would have done. The visits of these and the other ladies of the garrison were often repeated in the ensuing days, and Wallace soon found himself quite well acquainted with the handful of brave women who did not shrink from sharing with their

husbands the dangers, hardships, and constant, nerve-trying anxiety of this most hazardous frontier service.

So the days wore on; days which brought rapid healing to Wallace, whose youth and vigorous constitution befriended him so well that a week after that first morning in the hospital, Doctor Horton pronounced him able to sit up, and two days later he took his first walk out on the parade ground. These days were calm and pleasant, and so warm during the hours of sunshine that the soldiers generally wore blouses at their work, no overcoats being needed. The rushing, tinkling music of the Big Piney, cascading down its steep channel below the hill, was indeed hushed by ice, but winter still confined its blanket of snow to the towering slopes of the near-by mountains, whence hoary Cloud Peak looked grandly down upon the tiny fort in the lowlands. Nearly every day some grazing buffalo herds were to be seen in the distance down toward Tongue River or among the buttes in the direction of the Powder, to the east, while antelope or elk also frequently came into view. But few would have cared to ven-

ture out after them; and those who would were strictly forbidden by orders, so the game remained undisturbed, unless by the Indians.

By the nineteenth of December, Wallace was feeling so far recovered that he would have started with Vance for Fort Laramie had there been an opportunity, for, though, of course, he could not have brought his mother and the children to Bozeman for Christmas even if he had reached Fort Laramie ten days before, he was very anxious at least to spend the day with them there. But the party of Southern miners whom the boys had left at Fort C. F. Smith, had passed Fort Kearney while Wallace was still helpless in hospital, and no military escorts of any sort were going down from the fort for at least three days, as every available man was now being used to get in the last necessary building logs and firewood from the Pinery before bad weather set in, so that the dangerous work might be given up for the winter. Already behind the sawmills and lying under the guns of one of the blockhouses was heaped a vast pile of slabs and discarded logs amounting to hundreds of cords, ample to assure

the garrison of an abundance of fuel during the cold weather. But as it was necessary, anyway, to procure a few more building logs for the hospital, the General maintained the wood train at its usual size, employing the extra wagons to bring in more firewood so as to provide against any possible shortage. Once the trips to the Pinery were abandoned he did not wish to resume them until the next spring, for the Indians seemed to have come in from every region, near and far, and camped down in their favorite winter resort, the Tongue River Valley. Here they had evidently accumulated vast quantities of provisions to supply Red Cloud's army, which remained stationed around the fort ready to seize every opportunity of assailing the white men.

On the morning of the nineteenth, the wood train was attacked when about halfway to the Pinery. It was a strong train, consisting of chopping parties and guards for them in addition to the usual teamsters and escort, for no permanent force was now being maintained at the blockhouses on the island. When the train corralled, Captain James Powell was sent out from the fort to relieve it, receiving or-

ders from the General before starting merely to drive away the Indians, and on no account to pursue them for any distance. He obeyed his orders implicitly but reported on his return that the temptation had been strong to follow into the Peno Valley after the enemy, whose force was much larger than usual, amounting to several hundred warriors.

So impressed was the General by Captain Powell's report of the enemy's strength that next day he personally took charge of the train. Finding that the crossing of Big Piney at the island had become cut up by wagon wheels, he superintended the construction of a rough bridge and then remained with the chopping parties and guards throughout the day. The train returned safe and unopposed, and everyone realized with thanksgiving that next day would see the last trip to the Pinery, and that thereafter the continual anxiety concerning it would come to an end.

The morning of December twenty-first dawned even warmer and more beautiful than the days which had preceded it; so beautiful, indeed, that the experienced frontiersmen, like Major Bridger, pro-

nounced it a "weather breeder" and urged haste in immediately completing all preparations for storm and cold. The wood train, however, got away later than usual, though, on the other hand, it was stronger, consisting of nearly ninety men, teamsters, choppers, and escort, all well armed. Perhaps half an hour after they had passed out of the stockade, Wallace and Vance were standing in front of the sutler's store when they heard a sentry shout, "Indians!"

It was a warning cry to which they had long since grown accustomed, yet this morning for some reason it struck them with a shock. They noticed the Carrington boys and Bobby Wands, who had been playing on the parade ground, running to their respective homes, shrilly repeating the cry. Looking up at the picket on Pilot Hill, they saw the men there making the signal: "Many Indians attacking the wood train." The next moment the bugle sounded, and officers and men came hurrying from their quarters, the soldiers already detailed on the wood-train relief detachment streaming toward the stables after their horses.

Wallace and Vance, though the former was still quite stiff, ran across the parade, past the flagstaff, to the officers' quarters. As they reached them, General Carrington and Lieutenant Grummond were standing in front of the latter's cabin, next to headquarters, and Captain Powell was just running up, buckling on his saber belt. Before his quarters a short distance away Captain Fetterman, fully equipped, was walking back and forth nervously, apparently lost in troubled thought.

"Captain Powell," said the General, as that officer reached him, "you relieved the wood train handsomely day before yesterday. Will you take command of the detachment to-day?"

"Yes, sir, I shall be glad to," replied the Captain, promptly.

"Thank you, sir. You will follow the same instructions, then, that I gave you the other day. Relieve the train, but on no account pursue the enemy beyond Lodge Trail Ridge."

As he finished speaking, the General heard steps behind him and turned to see that Captain Fetterman and Captain Brown had come up. Fetterman,

his face for some unaccountable reason a little pale, saluted and said, rather excitedly: "General Carrington, as the senior captain present I claim the right to command the relief party."

An expression almost of pain crossed the General's sensitive face as he looked steadily at Fetterman. Then his eyes sought the ground, he hesitated for a moment and finally replied: "That is your right, Captain Fetterman. I will repeat my orders, just given to Captain Powell, who need not go now, since you wish to. You will relieve the train and protect it as far as necessary on its way to the Pinery. Then you will return here and report to me. Do not pursue the Indians beyond Lodge Trail Ridge." His voice became very earnest and he repeated with emphasis, "On no account, sir, must you allow yourself to be drawn across Lodge Trail Ridge with your small force, either by a precipitate retreat of the Indians or your own desire to punish them. You know what opposition we encountered there on December sixth. The enemy is much stronger now. You understand thoroughly what is required?"

Captain Fetterman, while receiving his orders, had stood with his head turned slightly aside, his eyes on the ground. Plainly he did not relish the instructions but he replied in a low tone to the General's question: "Yes, sir."

Captain Brown, who had been standing behind Fetterman with folded arms, looking across the hills, at this point turned away abruptly and walked toward the stables. In a moment Captain Fetterman saluted and followed him, the General looking after them with troubled eyes. Suddenly Lieutenant Grummond, whose wife stood on the doorstep behind him, her face drawn with anxiety, raised his head and said to the General in a low tone: "I should like to accompany the relief party, sir, with some of my men. They are very anxious, you know, to redeem themselves."

Since the death of Lieutenant Bingham, Grummond had been placed in temporary command of the Second Cavalry detachment, pending the arrival of another officer of that regiment. The General now looked almost with sorrow at his youthful subordinate, glanced at the latter's wife and said, appeal-

ingly: "Think of your wife, Lieutenant. Must you ask this?"

The handsome young fellow straightened his shoulders and his eyes flashed, as if the question were a slur on his courage. "Yes, sir," he replied, emphatically. "I wish to go. Under your orders there is little danger." His tone was slightly sarcastic.

"There is danger enough in any case," replied the General. Then he added, reluctantly: "But if you insist upon going, of course you may. You heard my instructions to Captain Fetterman. I charge you to follow them yourself." With a quick impulse he laid his hand affectionately on Grummond's shoulder. "Don't be rash, now, my boy," he begged. "Remember your wife and what your life means to her. Under no circumstances permit yourself or others to be drawn across the Ridge. Report to Captain Fetterman, implicitly obey orders and never leave him."

"Very well, sir," Grummond answered, with a smile which showed as plainly as words that he felt

it useless to dispute the orders, distasteful though they were to him.

He ran back and kissed his wife gayly on the lips, while she clung to him with tears in her eyes. Then, as she slowly released him, he sprang away and ran for the cavalry barracks. In a moment a number of his men came hurrying out, buckling on saber and revolver belts, and with him made for the stables, where the mounted infantry were already forming. Very soon the entire column, consisting of eighty men inclusive of the officers and two civilian frontiersmen, Wheatley and Fisher, drew up in front of headquarters for final orders.

But meantime the howitzers had opened and fired several rounds of case shot at a number of Indians who had appeared, for the first time since December sixth, in the brush at the junction of the Pineys, evidently anxious to observe how large a force was to be sent to the relief of the wood train. General Carrington watched them with his glasses, as did Wallace, until with satisfaction they saw the enemy scatter and flee under the fire of "the gun that shoots

twice." Then the relief party came up, and the General, in the hearing of everyone, repeated his orders to Captain Fetterman. As the column, with ringing hoofs and jingling accouterments, trotted through the gates, Wallace looked at Vance solemnly and said: "What makes everybody feel so blue, I wonder? They 've relieved the wood train dozens of times before."

"I don't know," replied Vance with equal gravity. "Maybe because they has n't been much of a fight since the sixth. They 's suah enough men to take caih of themselves this time, though they 've got a po' lot of guns. I 'd have voluntee'd to go along, like Wheatley and Fisheh—they have volcanic rifles like ouhs—but, somehow, I did n't want to. Look, the Gen'al 's haltin' 'em!"

They turned and saw General Carrington, who had sprung upon the banquette, or infantry platform, of the stockade, standing, tall and straight, looking out over the column. With the utmost impressiveness he called in a loud voice: "Captain Fetterman, my orders, remember, are to relieve the

train and under no circumstances to cross Lodge Trail Ridge."

Captain Fetterman looked up at him without a word, saluted and, turning, commanded, sharply: "Forward, march!" "Trot, march!"

With a hundred eyes following it, the column swung off down the wood road, turning gradually to the right after passing the sawmills, and disappeared behind a rise of ground. Unknown to most of the garrison until after his departure, Captain Brown had accompanied Fetterman, eager for "one more chance to get the scalp of Red Cloud himself." His presence made eighty-one men in the column, exactly the number with which he and Fetterman had boasted that they could ride back and forth through the whole Sioux Nation.

In silent suspense those who remained within the fort settled down to await the return of the relief party. A few moments later Wallace and Vance saw Doctor Hines, one of the assistant surgeons, escorted by four men, gallop out of the gate and after the column.

"Fetterman must have gone without a surgeon," said Wallace, "but he 'll soon have one."

They walked into one of the company barracks and had been chatting there for some time with a group of soldiers who were off duty, when a corporal entered hurriedly, slammed the door behind him and cried, in an excited voice which commanded instant attention: "Boys, something 's wrong. I 've been watching from the north stockade. Captain Fetterman did n't go to the wood train. He turned off the road an' went up the other side of Sullivant's Hills."

"Well, what of it?" growled a sergeant in the room, gruffly. "That 's within his orders, so long as he don't cross Lodge Trail. You bet Captain Fetterman knows what he 's doin'. And it 's good tactics," he added, with an air of deep military insight. "He 'll catch the redskins in the rear before they can get back from the train."

The uneasy one raised his finger and shook it to emphasize every word as he replied: "It 's all right, *if he has n't crossed Lodge Trail.*" He paused, then continued. "But I 'll bet you ten dollars to a leaky canteen that he has. He 's gone out

of sight an' I 'd swear that he did n't turn to the left, up the Piney. No, sir! He 's in Peno Valley this minute!"

With a strange dread oppressing their pulses, Wallace and Vance left the room. As they closed the outer door after them, they saw Doctor Hines riding rapidly back through the mill gates and they hurried toward headquarters. A small lookout tower surmounted this building and on top of it now stood General Carrington, field glasses in hand. Without descending he called to Doctor Hines: "Why did n't you join Fetterman, Doctor?"

The Doctor looked up at him and called back: "I could n't reach him, General. There were Indians everywhere ahead of us, and Captain Fetterman has gone out of sight, north of Sullivant's Hills. The Indians have given up the attack on the train; it 's gone ahead to the Pinery."

The General raised his hand and stroked his beard with a perplexed gesture. Then he fixed his glasses again on the opening between the hills to the northwest which disclosed a part of the Peno Valley.

It was about noon. Wallace noticed two ladies

walk quickly up to Mrs. Grummond's house and enter. They closed the door carefully, as if someone were sick within. Many men were standing in idle groups around the parade ground, talking together in low tones, now and then listening, expectant of they knew not what. All at once everyone stopped short and hearkened with bated breath as down from the northwest, faint but distinct on the clear, quiet air, came the sound of a few dropping shots. They swiftly increased to a continuous rattle, then came several rolling volleys, and then fierce, confused firing. It needed no experienced ear to tell that a desperate fight had suddenly begun over there and the circumstance that made the heart of every man and woman in the fort turn cold with dread, was that the sound of the firing came from beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. Wallace and Vance, their eyes dark with apprehension, looked at each other blankly.

"My God!" whispered Wallace, in a husky voice. "Captain Fetterman has disobeyed his orders! Vance, they 're over there across the Ridge, where Bingham was killed."

They glanced up at the General. Without taking the time to descend to the ground, his glasses still in his hand, he shouted to the bugler standing near the flagstaff: "Trumpeter of the Guard, sound the general alarm!"

As the bugle blared out the signal, used only at times of extreme danger, every man sprang away to his company quarters or other position assigned for such emergencies. All the officers were out before their cabins and the General swept them with a glance until his eye fell on quiet, reliable, lion-hearted Captain Ten Eyck.

"Captain Ten Eyck," he called, "Captain Fetterman has gone beyond Lodge Trail Ridge and is heavily engaged. Make up a relief column at once of forty infantry and enough mounted men to guard a supply wagon and act as scouts. I will inspect them myself as soon as they are ready. Have the ordnance officer furnish you with a wagon and forty rounds extra ammunition per man. Doctor Hines and Doctor Ould will accompany you with an ambulance."

Captain Ten Eyck ran for the company barracks.

Pointing at Lieutenant Wands, who was on duty, the General continued: "Officer of the Day, instruct the Officer of the Guard to release the prisoners from the guardhouse and put them on duty. Send couriers to the woods with orders to bring back the train and escort at once. Captain Arnold, take command of the post and require every available man, civilian as well as soldier, to report to you for duty, properly armed."

Having given the most urgent orders, the General now rapidly descended from the lookout and came upon the parade to inspect Captain Ten Eyck's detachment, already assembling. Without waiting to hear the final orders, Wallace and Vance, determining to go with the relief party unless directly forbidden, hurried to the barracks where they slept and secured their guns and revolvers. Wallace had lost his Henry rifle the day he was wounded but a number of the scouts and soldiers, admiring his courage, had clubbed together and bought him another, almost precisely like it, at the sutler's. Then they hurried to the stables, saddled their horses and rode out of the cavalry yard just as the infantry

column, marching at double-quick step, came past through the main gates. No one objecting, they fell in behind with the few mounted men who were marching on either side of the ambulance and a supply wagon which was loaded with extra ammunition as well as rations; for the troops carried no haversacks, though they might be out all day. With Captain Ten Eyck was the General's own orderly, Sample, and second in command of the column was Lieutenant Matson. All told, there were fifty-four men in the little party.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIELD OF NO SURVIVORS

WHEN Captain Ten Eyck and his detail left the fort, not more than fifteen minutes had elapsed since the first firing was heard, and it still continued with unabated fury as they descended to the Bozeman Road crossing of the Big Piney and passed from sight of the fort. The infantry crossed safely but the thin ice broke beneath the weight of the wagons and horses, though the swift water was not deep enough to do any harm. For nearly a mile farther they hurried on, following the road upward, before the rising ground again gave them a sight of the fort. Then they caught a glimpse of another little column of infantry following them down to the crossing, apparently about forty strong.

"Good Heavens!" said Vance, in dismay. "The Gen'al 's sendin' us mo' men. Why, Wallace, suppose the redskins attack the foht while we ahe out!

They can't be a hundred and twenty-five men left theah, wood train and all."

"No," answered Wallace, gloomily. "But Captain Fetterman must be rescued at all hazards. Listen, Vance! Is n't the firing dying out over there?"

Vance hearkened. The rattle of musketry was unmistakably decreasing to separate, dropping shots.

"Most likely," said Vance, slowly and without conviction, "the boys have repulsed the enemy."

Wallace did not reply. The infantrymen ahead of them, who had just slowed to a walk, were gasping for breath from their hard, swift upward climb, but as they turned off the road toward a high hill north of it, Captain Ten Eyck, his face strained with anxiety though his voice was calm, urged them again to the double-quick and they responded nobly, though their weary feet stumbled on the rough ground. Beyond the valley the last shots died away and an appalling silence followed. A few moments later, toiling up to the top of the hill, the command halted and officers and men stood looking with dilated eyes at the scene ahead.

Across the small valley below them, on the top

and sides of the long, narrow divide traversed by the Bozeman Road beyond Lodge Trail Ridge, were swarms of Indians; scores, hundreds, thousands of them. Not a white man was to be seen; the Indians were in full possession of the hill, and as they caught sight of Ten Eyck's handful, they burst forth into a tempest of yells and howls and fiendish laughter, galloping their ponies back and forth, shaking their lances and rifles in air and shouting defiance and wild challenges to him to come down and fight.

Wallace and Vance, being under no orders, had ridden up near to the two officers. Captain Ten Eyck, biting his mustache, looked down upon the heart-chilling spectacle with iron composure, obviously estimating the force of the enemy and seeking to discover some signs of Fetterman. At length he said to Lieutenant Matson: "In your opinion, should we go down there and try to join Fetterman?"

"No," replied Matson, decidedly. "He is not in sight, and we would be annihilated before we could reach him, wherever he is. That might be justifiable if it would do him any good, but I can't see that

we can help him except by keeping our force intact until at least we have some idea of where he is, so that we can strike effectively."

Captain Ten Eyck nodded in silent agreement, then drew his notebook from his pocket, wrote rapidly in it, tore out the leaf, and handed it to Orderly Sample. "Report to the General as quickly as you can and give him this message," he said.

Sample struck in his spurs and was off down the hill like the wind.

"I told him," said the Captain to his subordinate, "that the valley is full of Indians, that firing has stopped and we cannot see Fetterman's command, and that I must have reënforcements and a howitzer." He gazed for a moment at the horde of enemies below them and then continued, in an awe-struck tone: "Where can Fetterman be? There must be two thousand Indians down there."

"Fully," agreed the Lieutenant. With a feeble attempt at assurance, he added, "The detachment must be beyond the hill."

Sample, mounted on one of the General's own thoroughbred horses, was skimming like a swallow

along the road behind them. Presently he disappeared over the crest toward the Piney as the small infantry column, crawling like a snail in the distance, came into view at the same point. For some time Ten Eyck's men stood on the hill, the Indians, for all their bravado, not venturing to attack them in so favorable a position for defense. Presently Sample was seen racing back from the fort, and he arrived before the infantry reënforcement, bringing word of its coming and instructions from the General to Captain Ten Eyck to unite with Fetterman, fire slowly and keep his men well in hand. No howitzer could be sent, the General said, for none of the men with Ten Eyck knew how to handle it; moreover, all the guns were needed at the fort to protect women and children. Soon after Sample, the forty infantrymen came up, bringing more ambulances and three thousand rounds of extra ammunition. The Indians, seeing that they could not entice the party to a fight and perhaps fearing to do so now that its size was nearly doubled, were withdrawing from the nearer end of the divide.

As soon as he judged it less than sheer madness to leave his defensive position, Captain Ten Eyck formed his men in line and advanced cautiously down the hill, across the valley and up the point of the divide along the road. A few mounted men rode a short distance in advance, Wallace and Vance being among them. Their rifles were cocked and ready, for large rocks lay scattered over the hill, behind which Indians might lurk, though it was otherwise bare of cover.

Presently Wallace saw ahead a group of several huge bowlders standing quite close together, evidently enclosing a small space of open ground. They were just beside the road and he remembered having noticed them in passing along the ridge during the summer on his several trips to and from Bozeman. He and one or two others now approached them warily but, no enemy appearing, he rode up and, rising in his stirrups, peered between two of the stones.

For one moment he remained there, transfixed, his face blanching, his body rigid. Then he threw his

arm across his eyes as if forcibly to shut out the unthinkable scene and cried in a terrible voice that was quivering with horror:

"Merciful God! Captain—Ten—Eyck—come—quick!"

The Captain and others rushed up, looked over the rocks and, like Wallace, recoiled with half-maddened ejaculations. But in a moment more they recovered and steeling their nerves by supreme effort, climbed on the bowlders and gazed down. In the narrow pit of horror below them, which had apparently offered some faint hope of shelter from the last overwhelming assault of their unnumbered foes, lay heaped in grotesque confusion the lifeless bodies of forty-seven soldiers, stripped, scalped, gashed, shot full of arrows and bullets, and mutilated in a thousand unspeakable ways. Close by their men were stretched the silent forms of Captain Fetterman and Captain Brown, each with a bullet wound in his left temple, deeply burned by powder. There could be no shadow of doubt that when all hope was gone the two unfortunate officers, brave to madness and impetuous to their own undoing, had

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The narrow pit of horror

stood face to face and killed each other with their revolvers.

The sun, hidden by driving clouds, was sinking in the west. Along the darkening slopes and valleys ahead of the little band of white men, where the sere grasses rustled in a chill wind rising from the north, a few skulking Indian scouts could be seen watching them narrowly. Lieutenant Grummond, Citizens Wheatley and Fisher, and twenty-nine enlisted men were still unaccounted for. But with the awful evidence lying at his feet of the blast of death which had just annihilated a force nearly as large as his own, Captain Ten Eyck was not so foolhardy as to order a further advance in the face of descending night and almost certain destruction. Beyond question the men still missing were past all earthly aid, stark and lifeless on some more distant portion of the fearful battle ground. So, as tenderly as might be, the mortal remains of the forty-nine victims already found were lifted into the wagons and ambulances, filling them to overflowing, and the mournful procession took up the line of march back to the fort. At nine o'clock, long after complete

darkness had descended, it passed in through the main gates.

The shock to the garrison was awful. In spite of apprehensions, the possibility of such an overwhelming disaster as this had not been dreamed of.

The wood train had returned in the afternoon, unmolested, knowing not even that a battle had been fought; and yet, within five miles of the place where they had been working, almost one-fourth of the garrison had been wiped out in little more than half an hour. To poor Mrs. Grummond, who was instantly taken into the home and the heart of Mrs. Carrington, the blow was most terrible of all, but after the first paroxysms of grief she bore her bereavement with the courage of a Spartan woman, refusing to allow her own sorrow to add weight to the almost crushing burden of those around her. Every man was obliged to think not only of the fitting interment of the dead, whose remains temporarily filled the hospital and several vacant warehouses, but, more vital still, of the present and future safety of the living.

That very night, as if to add to the horrors of the

situation, a terrific storm swept down from the mountains, the temperature fell to many degrees below zero, and drifting snow began to pile up around the buildings and along the walls of the stockade. Lights burned in all quarters, as they did at night for weeks afterwards, and a non-commissioned officer was constantly on duty in every barrack to arouse the sleeping occupants in case of alarm. The cold was so intense that it was necessary to relieve the sentries along the stockade every fifteen minutes, and even then many of them were frostbitten. Yet that night, so overburdened with dread of the savage and exultant hordes outside and with the physical suffering brought by the blizzard howling over the wilderness, a hero of as lofty self-devotion as any whose name is immortalized in history, took it upon himself voluntarily to start out from the fort bearing an appeal for help from General Carrington to Fort Laramie, two hundred and thirty-five miles away. This noble man was John Phillips, nicknamed "Portuguese," a frontiersman in the employ of the quartermaster. Impressed with the desperate situation of the garrison and especially

pitying young Mrs. Grummond, to whom he presented his choicest wolf robe before departing, as a token of remembrance if he should perish, he left for his desperate ride on the General's finest horse. He asked not one cent of reward in case he should succeed in getting through, stipulating only that he should be allowed to use this horse, a request which was granted as soon as made. The General himself opened the sally-port for the messenger to pass out and, with a Godspeed wrung from the depths of the heart, closed and relocked it behind him. No one could foretell whether brave John Phillips would live to ride a single mile from the fort; at the best, many days must elapse before Fort Kearney could know whether or not his effort had been in vain. Yet the salvation of the post and all within it would in all likelihood depend upon his success; for no military messenger with an escort of fifty men—the least number that would be sure of reaching Fort Laramie safely—could possibly be detached from the garrison now without leaving the latter so weak that it would be exposed to complete destruction by the Indians.

Early the following morning General Carrington called a council of officers to determine whether an effort should be made to recover the remaining dead from the battlefield. Wallace and Vance, though they knew promptly enough of the final result, did not learn for a time of the deliberations of the council in detail. But they then found that nearly every officer present opposed making the attempt, not only because the detachment sent out would court its own destruction by the triumphant and blood-maddened foe, but because during its absence the post might be attacked and captured by overwhelming numbers, involving the destruction of every soul, both within and without. When the last officer had expressed his opinion, General Carrington quietly announced his decision.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I will not let the Indians entertain the conviction that the dead cannot and will not be rescued. If we cannot rescue our dead, as the Indians always do at whatever risk, how can you send details out for any purpose? The single fact would give them an idea of weakness here and would only stimulate them to risk an assault."

The General then announced that he would personally take command of the detachment, caused "assembly" to be blown and ordered his own horse, Gray Eagle, to be saddled and brought up. While the picked details from each company, numbering altogether eighty men, were making ready, he went in and bade farewell to Mrs. Grummond and to his own wife. To the widow he gave solemn assurances that he would recover and bring back her husband's body; a pledge which his own brave wife earnestly exhorted him to fulfill as she kissed him and bade him Godspeed.

Such was the devotion of the defenders of Fort Phil Kearney that every able-bodied man in it, including Wallace and Vance, had begged permission to join the rescue party. But the General would not deplete the garrison further than was absolutely necessary; so the boys, with one hundred and ninety-five others, were left behind and with anxious hearts watched the column of troops and wagons march out, accompanied by the General, Captain Ten Eyck, Lieutenant Matson, and Doctor Ould, and saw the gates closed and locked behind them.

Dreary hours now passed as the day wore on. Though the cold grew more bitter, the snow providentially ceased with the falling temperature, and from the fort could be plainly seen the pickets dotted on each successive hilltop along the line of march of the detachment, who were charged with conveying signals in either direction should the fort or the rescue party be attacked. Before leaving, the General had secretly opened the magazine, cut the fuses of spherical case shot and arranged the stored ammunition, so that by the touching off of a single match the whole could be exploded. To the Officer of the Day he had given the following orders, hastily scribbled on a bit of paper, but the most eloquent testimonial possible to the extreme perils of that day:

"Fire the usual sunset gun, running a white lamp to masthead on the flagstaff. If the Indians appear, fire three guns from the twelve-pounder at minute intervals and later substitute a red lantern for the white.

"If, in my absence, Indians in overwhelming numbers attack, put the women and children in the mag-

azine with supplies of water, bread, crackers and other supplies that seem best, and, in the event of a last desperate struggle, destroy all together, rather than have any captured alive."

At length "retreat" was sounded, and the sunset gun fired, and as the shadows of night gathered, the white lantern was run to the head of the flagstaff. After more weary hours, the sound of wagon wheels crunching through the snow came to the straining ears within the fort, and then the notes of "assembly," blown by the buglers of the General's party. Hearts throbbed with mingled thanksgiving for the safe return of the living and grief for the dead that they brought, as the garrison hurried into formation under arms; women and children ran to the doors as the numbed and weary soldiers filed into the stockade, and the wagons, carrying every one of the thirty-two remaining victims of the massacre, moved slowly to the hospital.

A few only of the harrowing sights which General Carrington's detachment had seen on the naked hill beyond Lodge Trail Ridge need be recorded, as Wallace and Vance heard them described by the men

who had seen them. The bodies were scattered all along the divide, from the point where Captain Ten Eyck had found the forty-nine victims between the rocks on the evening of the fight, clear to the northwestern end. Evidently Fetterman's party had first been surprised and attacked by immense numbers at the extreme end of the divide and, after fighting on the road for a time, had retreated, still fighting, toward the fort, losing heavily all the way. Finally, the survivors, with ammunition nearly expended, had been hemmed in between the rocks at the southeastern end and slaughtered in one grand rush by the enemy.

Most distant from the fort of all lay the body of Lieutenant Grummond, cut down, so far as could be judged, in a magnificent attempt to cover the retreat. Not far behind him, sheltered by rocks, lay the civilians, Wheatley and Fisher, the body of each surrounded by a ring of about fifty empty cartridge shells from their Henry rifles, while on the ground in front of them a number of slain Indian ponies and more than sixty great gouts of blood, each from a dead or wounded warrior since carried away by his

comrades, proved how dearly they had sold their lives. Near them, also, were the remains of a number of the steadiest veterans of the command; the men, in short, who knew by experience that retreat meant certain death, and who had therefore fought to the last breath right where they were. At a point near where Fetterman and Brown and their men had been heaped was the horse which Captain Brown had ridden into the fight—"Calico," a little Indian pony which he had given to Harry and Jimmie Carrington in 1865, at Fort Leavenworth. General Carrington's last act on leaving the hill was to order someone to look at the pony and, if it was not dead, to put it out of its misery with a bullet.

During all the march of the detachment from the fort and returning to it, not an Indian was seen. The red men were not accustomed to campaigning in such bitter weather; to this fact both the fort and the General's party probably owed their salvation. At all events, the heroic resolve of the General had been carried out fully and completely; the cherished dead had all been recovered to receive Christian burial; the honor of the garrison had been vindicated;

and over the field of the Fetterman Massacre, one of the only three fields in all the world's warfare from which no survivor of the vanquished ever returned, history was left to drape a mantle of glory unsullied by a single blot upon the chivalry of American arms.

The succeeding days were days of mental depression and constant, heavy physical exertion. The gloomy Christmas season, to which Wallace had looked forward with so much pleasure when he expected to spend it with his mother at Fort Laramie, brought neither festivities nor even respite from labor. The boys were working with the soldiers in all their numberless tasks; now digging with the frost-bitten details that, in fifteen-minute shifts, were slowly excavating the immense burial trench, fifty feet long and seven feet deep, in the hard frozen ground at the foot of Pilot Hill; now hammering and sawing with the men who were making pine coffins in the unused portion of the headquarters building; now hauling in firewood from behind the sawmills, or, again, helping to keep open the ten-foot ditch through the great snow bank which had drifted clear

over the western end of the stockade, and which was filled up by the constant storms almost as fast as it was cleared.

On Wednesday, December 26, occurred the funeral of the victims of the massacre, when eighty bodies were committed to the earth, only one being left out, that of Lieutenant Grummond, which his widow intended to take East for interment at the first opportunity. When would that opportunity come? The question now uppermost in all minds was whether heroic John Phillips had been able to win his way through savage foes and blinding storms to Fort Laramie, or whether he had perished on the journey, leaving to their fate those beleaguered men and women who could look to him only for hope of rescue.

New Year's Day came and passed, marked by the reading of an order before the assembled garrison defining and dedicating a military reservation and giving a National character to the burial place of the victims of the Fetterman Massacre and those others who had died before them in the performance of duty. Another week went by, and another.

Then one morning—it was that of January 16, 1867, and as cold and blustering as most of those which had preceded it—the picket on Pilot Hill gave a signal which was instantly reported by the sentry before headquarters and the lookout on the tower; a signal which brought everyone, officers, soldiers, women and children, scouts and civil employees, rushing out of doors regardless of the weather, with cheers and tears and hand-clasps of thanksgiving. For the signal waved from the snow-mantled hilltop read—

"Troops coming, five miles away, on the road from Fort Laramie!"

John Phillips had performed his mission! No wonder that bronzed soldiers of the garrison laughed and cried as they fell into ranks to welcome their deliverers. To help and escort the toiling column, a detail went trotting out through the main gates, flung wide for the first time since they had closed behind the last bodies brought in from Massacre Hill! No wonder that the splendid regimental band of forty pieces launched with thrilling spirit into a full-throated martial melody as the fur-

swathed, half-frozen men, the snow-covered wagons and frost-rimed horses, marched in through the gates, greeted by the wild cheers of the people they had come to save, and were hurried off by them to the genial warmth of the barracks and the reviving stimulus of hot coffee and bacon and beans!

Wallace and Vance stood delighted among the crowds in the steaming troop-rooms and listened with eager greed to the tales the new arrivals poured forth as they warmed themselves, of that march and the events which had preceded it. First they heard how John Phillips, at eleven o'clock on the night of December 25, when the mercury stood at twenty-five degrees below zero, staggered out of the darkness into the brilliant lights and throbbing music of the Christmas night levee at Fort Laramie—a gigantic, terrible figure in buffalo coat and boots and cap and gauntlets, with the snow matted in his hair and icicles trailing from his beard—and called forth the General commanding from the startled assemblage of officers in full dress uniforms and ladies in evening gowns, and delivered to him the dispatches from General Carrington, and then fell to the floor, sense-

less from long-continued exposure, exertion, and privation; while, out on the snow-covered parade ground, the noble horse that had borne him through that two hundred and thirty-five miles of wilderness winter lay dead of his efforts.

Then they heard how the relief column, four companies of the Eighteenth Infantry and two of the Second Cavalry, had hurriedly made ready for their midwinter march in obedience to telegraphic orders from Washington and had set forth, plowing their way for days through snowdrifts often six feet deep, which had to be dug out before the wagons could move ahead. They were joined at Fort Reno by Lieutenant-Colonel Wessels, of the Eighteenth and finally reached their destination, as related, with many men frost-bitten, while one had been frozen to death.

But one piece of news was brought by the relief column, which, though it assured the boys of an early opportunity to complete their long delayed journey to Fort Laramie, nevertheless made them tingle with indignation because of what it meant for General Carrington, the brave commander whom,

through weeks of bitter trial, they had come to love and admire and trust with all the ardor of their generous young hearts. The news was that orders had been brought from Department Headquarters at Omaha relieving him of the command of Fort Phil Kearney, which was to be turned over to Lieutenant-Colonel Wessels, and instructing him to remove his regimental headquarters at once to Fort Caspar, an unimportant post on the Overland Road, a hundred miles west of Fort Laramie. In effect, the order implied that General Carrington could no longer be trusted to command Fort Phil Kearney, and that his management of that post had been unsatisfactory. Eastern newspapers brought by the column in the enormous mail which had been accumulating for Fort Phil Kearney, showed clearly the false public impressions regarding the Fetterman disaster which had influenced the issuance of the unjust order. With no accurate information whatever to guide them and without waiting for the official reports of General Carrington himself, newspaper editors, Congressmen, and even army officers and high Government officials at Washington had

jumped to the conclusion that because such an appalling catastrophe had occurred, the commanding officer must be to blame; and they vented their outraged feelings upon General Carrington in all manner of abusive charges against his courage and military ability and common sense.

Vance, after reading one leading editorial in a great New York daily, slammed the paper down on the floor, kicked it with his foot, and then, his voice quivering with anger, burst out: "The man that wrote that pulin' idiocy ought to be strung up like a road agent! What does a fellow like that, a-sittin' in a desk chaih weahin' out pens, know about what 's happenin' away out heah by the Bigho'ns? Why, he says heah"— Vance snatched up the paper viciously—"he says, 'The ladies of the ga'ison ah' in the habit of th'owin' packages of sugeh and powdeh oveh the stockade to the squaws!' Imagine Mrs. Ca'ington o' Mrs. Wands a-doin' that! He says that the commandin' officeh refused to give the po', friendly, stahvin' Injins powdeh to hunt buffalo with when they came to the foht and begged fo' it. How does he reckon that wohks out with all the pow-

deh he says the ladies th'ow at the squaws? Law, Wallace, I reckon the commandin' officeh 's done given the Injins powdeh enough, but it 's always come along behind a bullet! An' then he says, top of all his fool talk, that Fettehman and his men weh lost because 'Gen'al Ca'ington foolishly and rashly *ohdehed* them to pu'sue the Indians into the trap,' and backs up the statement by sayin' that the Commissioneh of Indian Affaihs says so!"

Wallace uttered a short laugh. "I know, Vance," he said. "I 've been reading a lot of that stuff too. It 's sickening. But you know how the people in the States have been stuffed with statements of the complete success of the Laramie Treaty, and told how it has settled everything and brought all the Indians in the Northwest into a state of profound peace. It must have shocked them like fury to find out suddenly that most of the Indians in the Northwest are really in a state of profound war. You know how the War Department has all along refused to pay any attention to the General's letters and telegrams asking for reënforcements, because they vowed that this post was perfectly peaceful

and did n't need any more troops. And you remember hearing the boys tell how a company with a howitzer was run down the road one day last summer to rescue a corralled train that had with it a messenger sent up by the Laramie Commission to announce officially to General Carrington 'the conclusion of a satisfactory treaty of peace with all the Indians of the Northwest.' What are you going to do when people are as blind as all that? The General will be able to clear himself, all right, when he gets a chance to explain the truth, but right now he 's got to grin and bear it and pull out for Caspar, and we 've got to do the same along with him."

Such was the undeniable fact, and active preparations were already under way to carry out as comfortably as possible for all concerned the peremptory and cruel order. This order admitted of no delay or alteration and, in effect, required not only officers and men but a score or more of women and children, the families of several officers and of members of the band, to march forth through mountainous snows and numbing cold and the constant menace of Indian slaughter a distance of more than

two hundred miles. Captain George B. Dandy, District Quartermaster, who had come up with the reënforcements, took charge of preparing wagons for the comfort of the women and children. For this purpose he doubled the canvas cover on each wagon and boarded up the ends, leaving a window in each and fitting a tight, swinging door at the rear, near which was placed a small sheet-iron stove made of stove-pipe. Blocks of dry pine cut to fit the stove were piled in the corner of each wagon, and an extra wagon filled with blocks was to accompany the train. A mattress, heaped with all the buffalo, wolf, bear-skin, or other fur robes that the occupant could scrape together completed the furnishing. Forty empty wagons were also to go down to Fort Reno after supplies for Fort Phil Kearney, and the whole train was to be escorted as far as Reno by a guard of forty infantry and twenty cavalry under command of Lieutenant Bowman and guided by Captain Bailey, the scout and miner. Major Bridger, with his weight of years, did not feel himself equal to the rigors of such a journey, and he was to remain behind.

The new troops from Laramie, uncomfortably packed in over-crowded buildings, were awaiting the departure of the train to move into more roomy quarters; and so, at half-past one o'clock on the afternoon of January 23, 1867, the long line of wagons creaked out of the main gates and down to the ice-locked Piney. The thermometer stood at thirteen degrees below zero, thick clouds obscured the sun, and the air was filled with fine, stinging particles of snow. Ahead of them lay the desolate, drifted plains; behind them, on the hill, the smoke was issuing from the chimneys of Fort Phil Kearney, the scene of so many toils and sufferings, disasters and triumphs, whose memory would be vivid through the years. Yet the fort appeared very cheerful and homelike now to the wistful eyes that looked back upon it. In one of the wagons sat Mrs. Grummond, and in another lay the casket of her husband, while with the cavalry escort, swathed in furs from head to foot, rode Wallace and Vance, bound at last, after nearly two months of waiting, for Fort Laramie and the anxious woman and children who awaited them there.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BITTER MARCH

FROM the first moment the journey became a stern struggle with the elements. All the cuts dug out by the column coming up from Laramie had been filled again by later storms, and as the wagons pulled up the incline beyond the Little Piney, with mules braying and plunging, and drivers shouting and cracking their whips, the leading teams became stalled in a huge drift extending across the road between the base of Pilot Hill and the eminence east of it. The boys, riding at the rear of the train and still on the fort side of the creek, turned out and looked ahead at the struggling wagons. Then Wallace cried: "Come on, Vance; let 's go up there to the front and get shovels from the tool wagon. It 's lots warmer working, and we 'll be cold soon enough, anyway."

Their horses wallowed through the snow along-

side the train, and presently they passed General Carrington, who had dismounted beside the wagon in which his wife and boys were riding and was speaking to them through the front window.

"Going to get your blood in circulation, boys?" asked the General.

"Yes, seh," answered Vance. "It 'll take all hands, I reckon, to shovel out the road to Caspah."

They smiled at Mrs. Carrington, who waved her hand to them through the window, and rode on. The wagon filled with picks, shovels, axes, and wagon repairs was the leading one of the train. The boys quickly tied their horses at the back of an empty wagon, secured shovels, and went to work with the dozen or more pioneers who were clearing a deep, narrow cut through the great drift. A half-hour of hard labor brought them to the other side of it, and then for a few hundred yards the wagons could progress without shoveling before encountering the next drift which had to be cleared.

Thus through the afternoon they struggled on, advancing only foot by foot. So exhausting was the work of the pioneers that frequent relays had to

relieve each other; and as dusk descended over the landscape, already obscured in the driving snow, the wagons pulled into corral to await the rising of the moon. They had advanced only six miles from the fort.

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" exclaimed one of the younger cavalrymen to Wallace, as he saw the guide halt on the crest of a high, wind-swept hill and direct the leading wagons to begin forming corral, "Captain Bailey 's picked a nice, cool place for campin'. How the dickens does he suppose we can stand this awful wind up there? Why, we 'll freeze in no time!"

"No, we won't, Broderick," answered Wallace, reassuringly. "You don't know how much cold a person can stand, or you would n't think that. It 'll be tough, but Bailey thinks we 'd rather be cold and keep our scalps than be a little warmer and lose 'em. If we corralled in a valley the Indians might run right over us, if they 're around, but up here on the hill we 'll be in a good defensive position."

"All right; you know this game, an' I don't," said the young soldier, peering out miserably through the narrow, frost-rimmed face-hole of his

big wolf-skin cap and beating his numb hands across his breast. "But, believe me, if I ever pull through to serve out my enlistment, I 'm goin' to Florida an' make my livin' pickin' oranges, if I starve to death doin' it."

Floundering in the snow with backs as often as possible to the icy wind, whose bitter sting penetrated even the thick layers of furs in which everyone was clad, the men unhitched the animals and gave them their evening rations of oats in the feed boxes on the wagon tongues, shielding the measures as they poured the grain, in order that it might not be blown away. Then they crouched down in huddled groups behind or in the wagons to catch a little sleep, or tramped back and forth in efforts to keep their chilling blood in motion. No fires were allowed, and there was no fuel for them if they had been. But with falling darkness the wind had providentially died down, and soon the clouds broke and the stars shone out, while the wavering streamers of the aurora borealis shot their pallid flames along the north. At one o'clock the bugle sounded and the teams were harnessed, and at three, the gibbous

moon having at last appeared above the eastern horizon, Captain Bailey gave the word for the train to form column, and it slowly descended from the frigid hilltop into the lowlands beyond.

In the constant heavy labor of plowing through the snow and digging out the frequent drifts, the men hardly realized that the temperature was steadily falling throughout the day, though such was the fact. At Clear Fork the mules were fed, and the men made a hasty breakfast of such articles of food as could be eaten, uncooked, from haversacks or cracker boxes. Then the march was resumed. In the afternoon the train passed large numbers of buffalo scattered over the country, quietly wallowing and pawing in the snow to get at the grass beneath. Their presence somewhat quieted the fears of the travelers regarding Indians, as it hardly seemed likely that red men could be near when these animals were so numerous and tranquil. Before nightfall, by dint of ceaseless efforts, the train reached Crazy Woman's Fork and corralled in the grove of large trees at the bend of the stream where the road crossed it. Feeling reasonably confident

now that no Indians were in the vicinity, and that, even if they were, they would not attempt an attack on such a night, the General ordered the men to build fires. Indeed, these were an absolute necessity, danger or no danger, for it was evident that without them the exhausted soldiers were nearly all liable to freeze to death before morning.

"Let 's get our horses tied to these trees," said Wallace to Vance, as they led their animals to a couple of large cottonwoods near which some soldiers were heaping up a pile of logs. "We can stay by this fire ourselves and keep an eye on them and perhaps they 'll get a little warmth too. Do you know how cold it is now, Captain Arnold?" he asked of an officer who was tramping by through the snow.

"By the thermometer in Mrs. Carrington's wagon it 's twenty-eight below and falling," replied the Captain.

"*In* her wagon or *on* it, did you say, Captain?" inquired Wallace, startled.

"*In* it; *in* it; right over the stove," the Captain returned with emphasis. "Heaven only knows how cold it is outside. It 's going to be a hard night.

But if it was n't for the shelter of the hill we 'd be much worse off."

He went on, and the boys glanced at the hill to which he had referred. It was about sixty feet high and very steep, and it rose close above them, just beyond the grove. They reflected that it would be the first obstacle the train would have to encounter on resuming the march next morning, if, indeed, anyone survived until that time.

Then Vance remarked, uneasily: "If the Injins get up on top theah they 'll have a lovely time shootin' this camp to pieces."

"There won't be any Indians up there to-night, Vance," returned Wallace, with confidence. "It 's too cold for them. Let 's help to get wood for this fire."

They hurried over to where some soldiers were kicking and tugging at a log, for the ground under the trees was covered with dry, fallen timber, though it was so deeply buried in the snow that much labor was required to dig it out. When the log had finally been uncovered and chopped into suitable lengths, the pieces were dragged to the fire

and heaved up on top of the roaring pile, which was heaped as high as the men could reach. A dozen other similar fires were sending their crackling tongues of flame leaping up among the tree-tops within the circle of wagons, yet the intense heat they radiated seemed to be lost in the frigid air around them within three feet of the very flames themselves.

"Just a-look at that, now!" exclaimed Vance, disgustedly, as he and Wallace, standing as near as possible to the fire, turned first their faces and then their backs to the heat. "The snow melts off the sticks and runs down to the bottom and freezes again so fast that I 'll bet these fiahs 'll be walled in solid with ice by mawnin'."

"I should n't wonder," agreed Wallace, reaching out to turn above the flames the chunk of frozen bread, broken from the loaf with a hatchet, into which he had managed to bore the end of a stick. "What fools we were to bring this bread instead of hardtack! Hardtack would n't have frozen, but I don't believe we can ever thaw this stuff out enough to eat it. My, but I 'd give a lot for a cup of hot

coffee! But it could n't ever be boiled tonight over these fires."

Eventually the boys, like the soldiers and teamsters around them, managed to make out a frugal supper of thawed bread and bacon, the latter burned, rather than fried, on the coals. Then came the laborious process of watering the horses and mules from buckets, the men tramping back and forth in a line to the creek, where a hole had been cut through ice more than three feet thick to reach the water beneath. The work took several hours, as the water froze so fast in the buckets that the ice had to be scraped and broken from their sides and bottoms after every trip, and it was nearly ten o'clock before all the animals had been satisfied.

The men, after their unceasing exertions of the past thirty-two hours were ready to drop with weariness, and those having the least physical endurance now began to do so. Wrapping their blankets around their fur garments and throwing themselves down as close as possible to the fires, they sunk into the profound stupor of exhaustion, careless as to whether or not they should be frost-

bitten while asleep. The hardier ones for a time declined to risk the danger, Wallace and Vance being among the number. The guard detail and the teamsters were also obliged to keep awake, the latter because most of the mules, becoming frantic with the cold as the night wore on, began rearing and plunging, biting and kicking and, finally, breaking their halters and galloping around the corral, scattering snow over the fires and the sleeping men around them as they went. From the mouths of the numbed teamsters, tormented by the actions of their animals, came volleys of profanity heated enough to have warmed the surrounding atmosphere on any less frigid night.

The headquarters wagons, and those containing officers' families, stood in the center of the corral, and the white streamers of smoke pouring upward from their stove-pipes revealed how constantly the ladies were replenishing their little stoves with fuel. Presently, as Wallace and Vance, their teeth gritted to keep from going to sleep and falling on the ground, were tramping back and forth before the fire, Lieutenant Wands, whom they could recognize

only by the peculiar cut of his fur cap, came by from a visit to the sentry posts.

"Well, boys, how are you making it?" he asked, cheerily, stopping by the fire.

"As well as any of the rest, I guess, Lieutenant," answered Wallace. "Vance and I are afraid to go to sleep but we 'll probably have to soon. We can't keep awake much longer; at least, I can't."

"Come with me," said the officer, confidentially. "I 'll get you something that 'll brace you up a bit."

He started toward the headquarters wagons, then stopped again and looked down at the eight or ten sleeping men huddled around the fire.

"How are these fellows, do you think?" he asked. "All right?"

"I think so, sir," Wallace replied. "Fritz, over there—Private Muhlenberg, you know—was awfully cold when he lay down, but we 've shaken him awake two or three times and made him wiggle his fingers and toes to feel that they 're not freezing."

"That 's the system," said Wands, approvingly. "How are your own?"

"Wahm as toast," declared Vance, with unblush-

ing exaggeration, Wallace having stepped over again to look at Muhlenberg. "Ouh boots ah' three thicknesses of buffalo hide with fuh on the inside."

"I should think, Lytle," said the Lieutenant, evidently recalling the other's nativity from his accent, "that this weather would be rather hard on your Southern blood."

"Well, seh, it is soht o' chillin', fo' a fact," admitted Vance. "But I got a bit used to it up in Montana last winteh and I ain't a-goin' to peteh out any sooneh than the No'the'nehs, if I can help it."

Wallace joined them again, and the three floundered over to the headquarters wagons. As they came up, Lieutenant Wands called through the door of his wife's wagon:

"Have you any coffee ready, my dear?"

The boys thrilled with ecstasy. Hot coffee! Here was a treat coming for them, indeed. They had not dared dream of it, tonight.

"Only one cup, Aleck," Mrs. Wands answered, looking through the window and seeing three of them. "But I can have another one soon, though it 's all I can do to make it even simmer."

"Here 's another cup," called Mrs. Grummond from the next wagon, opening the door a crack. "Is that Vance Lytle?"

"Yes, Mrs. Grummond, it is," replied Vance stepping over.

"I 'll give it to you in just a minute," she said, "and then you run to the General's fire there and drink it before it gets cold. I know just how frozen you must be. You and I are both from dear old Dixie; and, oh, don't you wish we were there tonight?"

"Oh, Mrs. Grummond, just don't I, though!" echoed Vance. "But it wahms me up just to heah yo' say 'Dixie.'"

Wallace, meantime, had received his steaming tin cup from Mrs. Wands, catching, as he took it, a glimpse of the interior of her wagon, heaped with robes; she herself swathed in furs, was bending toward the door, and little Bobby, whimpering miserably, was lying with his small buffalo boots thrust close to the hot sheet iron stove. Vance having taken his cup from Mrs. Grummond, the two boys

hastened to the near-by fire, in front of which General Carrington, Lieutenant Bowman, and Captain Bailey were stamping their feet.

"Don't drink that coffee fast, boys," said the General. "Sip it, or the heat will do you more harm than good. How are the men getting along by your fire?"

"Pretty well, I think, sir," Wallace answered, between sips of the coffee, so reviving to his chilled body. "Most of them are asleep."

General Carrington shook his head. "Of course, they must sleep," said he, "but it 's very dangerous. I will go around again myself in a few minutes and see how they are at the different fires."

"How cold is it now, General?" Wallace asked.

The commander laughed grimly. "It was thirty-seven below in my wife's wagon a few minutes ago," he answered, "and it will reach forty before long, for it 's only a little past twelve o'clock now. But you know mercury freezes at thirty-nine and a half degrees below zero, Fahrenheit; so after it reaches that point we won't be able to tell how cold it is, even

in the wagons, as we have no alcohol thermometer. And probably we shall be none the worse off for not knowing."

Having imbibed the last delicious drop of their coffee, the boys returned to their own fire. They found three men standing beside it, engaged in a violent argument. One of them was the Sergeant of the Guard, the other two were teamsters.

"I tell you once for all, now, get back to your teams before I call the O. D." (Officer of the Day), cried the Sergeant, holding his gun threateningly. Then, relenting, as he never would have done under less extreme circumstances, he went on, "Lord, men, I know just how cold you are. I 'm just as cold myself, and it 's hell to have to drive you away from the fire. But those mules of yours can't be left tearin' the wagons to pieces. Go back now, won't you?"

The teamsters, standing with stiffened hands outstretched almost in the fire, did not budge.

"Call the O. D., if you wanta," said one of them, sullenly. "I ain't a-gonta mind a mule ner drive another rod till it 's warmer."

"I 'm froze stiff an' I 'm dead fer sleep," declared the other driver, hoarsely. "The O. D. can't do worse 'n kill me, an' I wisht he would—er you either." He looked at the Sergeant almost with appeal.

The Sergeant started away to call his officer, but came face to face with a third man stumbling toward the fire. This was a soldier, and the gun thrust under his arm indicated that he was on duty.

"Go back to your post!" shouted the Sergeant, wrathfully. "You 'll get put in irons!"

"Oh, Sergeant, let me warm myself just five minutes," begged the sentry, piteously. "My post 's right back of this wagon. I can watch from here an' my feet are goin' to sleep. You mind Mrs. Carrington's driver this afternoon, how his legs was froze to the knees when we took him off his saddle. He 'll never live when they cut 'em off. Oh, I don't want to die that way, Sergeant!"

The Sergeant stamped his own feet furiously for a moment, saying nothing. Then he announced, with a great show of severity: "I 'm going for the Officer of the Day. You fellows all be back where

you belong inside five minutes or you 'll catch thunder."

He waded off through the snow, and the three men hugged the fire desperately, watching for the appearance of the officer in the distance. Wallace and Vance observed them with only a mild curiosity, being themselves on the verge of unconsciousness, for, though the coffee had warmed them, it seemed only to have made them sleepier than before. At length Vance, rousing himself enough to speak, said: "Wallace, I can't stand it any longeh. I 've just *got* to sleep. I 'm pretty wahm; I don't believe I 'll freeze."

"If you had n't said that, I would, in a minute more," declared Wallace. "Our clothes and blankets are heavy; they ought to keep us from getting hurt."

They went to their saddles and unstrapped the blanket rolls, trying to shut their ears to the piteous whinnying which the two horses set up on their approach, for they could do nothing more than they had already done for the comfort of the poor animals. Wrapping the thick woolens closely about them and

tucking their mittened hands under their arm-pits, they lay down on the ice with feet to the fire and were instantly lost in sleep as profound as a trance.

It seemed not a minute, though it was really almost four hours later, that Wallace's senses, struggling up to activity through unfathomable depths of unconsciousness, made him at last aware that he was being violently kicked and shaken, while a voice was yelling in his ear: "Git up, here, git up! We 're shtartin'."

Never in his life, it seemed to him, had he felt so paralyzed with weariness, and never had his blankets been so delightfully warm and cozy as at this moment, when the piercing outer cold struck his nostrils. He opened his aching eyes with a violent effort. The fire before him was a great heap of glowing coals sunk in a bowl of ice and the night stars, like points of steel, still glittered with undiminished brilliancy in the purple depths of the sky.

"Oh, let me have just one more nap," he begged. "Just one!"

"No, git up!" persisted the relentless voice, which he now recognized as that of one of the corporals of

the guard whom he knew well. "Begorra, we 've *got* to shtart. The byes are freezin' here." The voice became appealing. "Come, Smith, come; ye must help us git 'em up. Ye 've niver failed in a pinch, Smith; don't do it now."

The appeal touched Wallace as force could not do. With a groan he forced himself to sit up, then threw off his blankets and arose. He heard a bugle, slurringly blown by stiffened lips, sounding reveille. All around the fire the other men, including Vance, still lay motionless.

"Thot 's the sixth toime reveille's blowed," said the Corporal, "an' the poor byes don't moind it more 'n the buzzin' av a moshkiter. Git a whip frum the wagon beyant an' hilp me rousht 'em. Whip their ligs to shtart the blood."

Dumbly Wallace obeyed, noticing as he walked to the wagon that at all the other fires similar struggles were in progress to awaken the sleepers. When he came back the Corporal was vigorously wielding his mule whip on the legs of two of the soldiers, who were coming to their senses with curses and cries of pain. Wallace would not touch Vance with his

whip. Instead, he flung himself violently upon the latter and rolled him over and over on the ground, imitating a desperate wrestling match until Vance really awoke and, furious at the disturbance of his slumbers, began struggling in earnest. Presently, panting but thoroughly warmed, they came to rest, with Vance sitting on Wallace's chest.

"What in thundeh yo' tryin' to do?" growled Vance.

"Get off!" Wallace gasped in reply. "I had to wake you. The train 's starting."

"Oh, is it you, Wallace?" asked Vance, springing to his feet. "I reckoned it was some fool with a nightmahe."

They joined forces with the Corporal to arouse the remaining men, some of whom were veterans who had served through the Civil War; brave, hardy, faithful soldiers. Yet even when brought to their feet by the whips, they staggered to the fire and refused point-blank to put on their equipments or go to the aid of the teamsters who, with fingers that felt as stiff as corncobs, were struggling to get the harnesses on their stamping, rearing mules.

Presently Lieutenant Bowman came hurrying past them.

"Every man who is n't ready to start by six o'clock," he called, sternly, "will be left here without rations."

This was too terrible a prospect for even the desperate, half-frozen soldiers to ignore. They went to their work, sullen and cursing. As they were saddling their horses, Wallace noticed Vance several times clutch his left hand with his right, as if in pain.

"What 's the matter with your hand, Johnnie?" he asked, anxiously.

"Oh, I got my ahm out, like a fool, in the night," replied Vance, impatiently, "and I seem to have frosted my fingehs. They tingle like Sam Hill. But I ain't kickin', so many of the boys have been frozen wohse."

By dawn the train was finally ready. But when it undertook to mount the steep hill across the Fork, the leading wagons stalled at once in the deep snow, and shoveling details had to go ahead to clear the road. Even after they had finished, the first team that tried the ascent gave out before reaching half-

way to the top and came sliding back, mules plunging, wheels spinning and drivers vainly yelling and wielding their whips, and crashed into the wagons immediately behind, jamming and tangling them in a confused mass. Only by doubling teams on each wagon, aided by details of men pushing on the wheels, were all finally brought to the top, and it was full nine o'clock before that first sixteenth of a mile was accomplished and the actual march resumed toward Fort Reno, still twenty-six miles distant.

But the country was more open now, and the marching, consequently, much easier, so that, in spite of an alarm of Indians (which happily turned out to be buffalo, but which caused the loss of an hour in forming corral and breaking it again), the weary and suffering caravan before nightfall filed through the gates of Fort Reno, flung wide to receive it, and men, women, and children were soon thawing their congealed blood before roaring fires in the snug buildings of the little post. But though the shelter of Fort Reno brought warmth to all and delightful rest to many; and though Captain Proctor, Lieutenant Kirtland, and their soldiers did all that men

could do to make the wayfarers comfortable, the sad results of the terrible march just finished here became apparent. More than half of the escort and teamsters suffered with frozen fingers, toes or ears. Brave Assistant Surgeon Hines had all the fingers of both hands frozen black; and two men—one of them Mrs. Carrington's driver—were obliged to submit to the amputation of entire limbs and died from the effects. For many hours the post surgeons were busy at the hospital in making these and less serious amputations, and Vance counted himself very fortunate that it was found possible to save the fingers of his left hand, though for days afterwards they caused him great pain.

Three days after arriving there the headquarters train left Fort Reno, bound for Caspar. It was much smaller now, the forty wagons which were to go back to Kearney with supplies having been cut off and the escort reduced in number, since danger from Indians would not be nearly so serious from Reno on southward. The bitter weather had modified, and traveling, though still far from comfortable, was not attended with the physical agony which

had characterized the first sixty-five miles' march from Fort Phil Kearney.

It was at the mouth of Sage Creek, a tributary of the North Platte, on the fourth day out from Reno, that Wallace and Vance bade farewell to General Carrington and the officers and ladies with him, all of whom had become so endeared to them through months of mutual peril. The boys were going down to Laramie in company with a mail escort from Reno, which had traveled thus far with the General's party, while he was here turning westward to follow the North Platte up to Fort Caspar.

"Good-by, boys," said the General, giving each of them a hearty hand-clasp as they stood ready to mount their horses after having parted from the ladies and the other officers. "You have been through many hardships with us, and I shall miss you. I feel as if you belonged to my regiment." His voice grew more serious, and he looked at them earnestly. "I have always found both of you brave, intelligent, and loyal," he went on. "I wish I could say as much of every man and boy I have had to depend upon in emergencies during my life.

If you will carry into your future careers the same manly principles of conduct that have governed you while I have known you, I am sure that you will win high places in this new, wonderful West where you have settled 'to grow up with the country,' as the saying goes. I hope, Wallace, that you will find your mother and brother and sister safe and well at Fort Laramie. And I hope, too, that some day we shall meet again, under happier conditions than at Fort Phil Kearney. If I can ever aid either of you in any way, do not fail to call upon me. Good-by again, and God bless you both."

Wallace and Vance, feeling very happy over such words of praise and confidence from the gallant soldier whom they had learned to esteem beyond most other men, mounted their horses and galloped after the mail escort. The last sight that greeted their eyes as they rode over the next hill was the handkerchiefs of Mrs. Carrington, Mrs. Wands, and Mrs. Grummond, waving to them from the doors of the wagons.

The ride to Fort Laramie was without unusual incident. As all the men were well mounted, the dis-

tance was covered rapidly. About forty-eight hours after leaving Sage Creek the boys dismounted before the door of the house at which Mrs. Smith was boarding, and knocked. Wallace's mother herself opened the door, and with a glad cry threw her arms around his neck.

"Wallace, Wallace!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how thankful I am to see you at last! What a terrible time you and Vance have had!"

"Yes, we have, mother," answered Wallace, as they stepped inside and, removing their furs, extended their hands to the grateful warmth of a big heating stove. "You got the messages that Vance and I sent down by that party of Southern miners, early in December, telling you that I had been wounded but not seriously?"

"Yes, indeed I did, and it frightened me terribly, in spite of all you said about it not being serious. But I saw Mr. Phillips soon after he reached here on Christmas night from his dreadful ride and, for all the terrible news that he brought, I felt easier about you because he told me you had recovered from your wound and had not been harmed in the

Fetterman fight. I knew then that you would be down here as soon as possible after the reënforcements reached Fort Phil Kearney, provided you were not all massacred by the Indians before they got to you."

"Well, there was serious danger of it," Wallace admitted. "But Providence permitted us to escape. And now, mother, I just found out as we came through the fort here that a stage will leave day after tomorrow for Salt Lake City, so we must begin getting ready. Father must be nearly out of patience by this time. Vance and I both came down to take you and the children through, but you have certainly had to wait a long time for us."

"It has been a dreadfully long, anxious waiting, indeed, my dear boy," Mrs. Smith replied. "But now that it is over I can only be happy that you are with me again, safe and sound."

It is unnecessary to follow in detail that long, slow winter stage journey by way of Bridger's Pass, Fort Bridger, Fort Hall, and Virginia City to Bozeman. Enough to say that though it was a hard, cheerless trip, especially as measured by the travel-

ing standards of later days, it involved no such experiences as Wallace and Vance had encountered on their southward march from Fort Phil Kearney. The stagecoaches stopped at least every night at ranch houses which furnished travelers with warm sleeping quarters and hot meals. On this particular journey neither road agents nor Indians were encountered. At length there came a bright day in March when the party drove up the main street of Bozeman in a wagon which Wallace had hired at Virginia City, and stopped in front of the new house. Its comfortable, homelike appearance caused Mrs. Smith to utter exclamations of surprise and delight, for the boys had been careful to conceal from her until the last moment the fact that the new home was anything more pretentious than a simple log cabin.

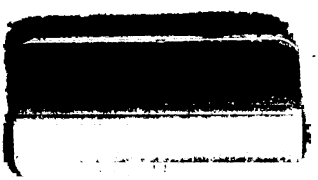
It was just noon when they arrived; and Mr. Smith, who was eating dinner, rushed out of the house and bounded down the front steps like a schoolboy, at sight of the wife and children whom he had not seen for nearly two years. Behind him in the doorway Doctor Mahan waited smiling, to give

them the more quiet but nevertheless hearty welcome of an old and well-tried friend.

And so we might leave them at the threshold of the new home in which at last they stood reunited after so many trials and delays. But a word may yet be said of the fortunes which attended them during the next few years of their lives in young, fast-growing Montana. The firm of Samuel Smith & Son, having become firmly established in Bozeman while the town was yet in its infancy, continued by wise management to expand and prosper as did the city itself, becoming in time one of the leading mercantile concerns of the Territory. In the new home young Harvey and Bessie Smith grew to vigorous youth, enjoying during their periods of vacation from the excellent schools which Bozeman soon possessed, the healthful outdoor life offered by such a country.

Doctor Mahan and Vance long continued to be inmates of the hospitable Smith home. The Doctor prospered in his profession; and, as for Vance, no sooner had the establishment of courts and a permanent judicial system been brought about in Mon-

tana than his months of faithful evening study began to bear fruit. He was admitted to the bar, where his sterling integrity, legal knowledge, and winning personality soon gave him high standing and a profitable practice.

Both Vance and Wallace were keenly disappointed when, in the summer of 1868, the Government, becoming discouraged by the continued bitter hostility of Red Cloud and his followers, evacuated Forts Reno, Phil Kearney, and C. F. Smith, which were immediately burned by the Indians. The abandonment of the direct road to Fort Laramie and the Union Pacific Railway did not seriously affect the business of the Smiths' store; for the owners, after their hazardous experience in freighting goods over it in 1866, afterwards had their wholesale orders shipped up the Missouri River to Fort Benton. But for the sake of their army friends, all of whom had struggled so bravely and many of whom had died so gallantly to keep that road open, the boys regretted to see it finally lost; yet they could but admit that, from the standpoint of pure justice, Red Cloud well deserved the triumph thus achieved,

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